The author of *Pre-School Education* here considers what can and what cannot be done with the religious instruction of children in the pre-school age. Her book is at all times child-centered and religion is allowed to play a normal and logical part in the discussion. In her introduction she states the problem as epitomized in a discussion among mothers which she overheard. Next she takes up the question, How Shall We Begin? Then passes on to consider the child's inheritance, personality at the nursery age, the use of song and story with appropriate illustrations, prayer and worship, and the methods of teaching. A particularly valuable part of the book will be found in the chapter on sex instruction for children, which Mrs. Forest takes up under the caption, Fact and Symbol. Her book will prove immensely practical to all who work with children.

CHILD LIFE AND RELIGION

CHILD LIFE AND RELIGION

BY

ILSE FOREST

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TO
J. E. AND T. H.
AND
TO THEIR MOTHER

INTRODUCTION

"What shall I tell my child about religion?" asked a perplexed member of a child study class.

"I don't tell my child anything," volunteered another. "My ideas are much too vague to explain, and I won't tell him things I don't believe myself."

"My child asked me what became of us when we died, and I didn't know what to say. So I changed the subject," remarked a third.

These fragments of conversation are fairly typical of the state of mind prevailing in liberal circles concerning religious education. Many parents whose own convictions are the hard-won product of experience and mature reflection, too honest to tell their children "things they don't believe themselves," wrestle with the uneasy feeling that it is both unwise and impracticable to postpone religious training indefinitely. One frequently hears the remark, "I got something from my own training which was very valuable to me. But I don't know any honest way of passing it on to my children." More rarely, one encounters the question "*How* can I explain to my small children the beliefs which mean so much to me?"

This book is not intended to be a book *on* reli-

gious education. Rather, it is a study of small children and their thinking, and a discussion of some principles of psychology and teaching with special reference to religious education.

The present writer assumes that, in practice, religious education has certain purposes common to every creed, and that, in the main, the purposes are these:

To develop a concept of God, and a conscious adjustment to the mysteries of life and death; to cultivate the power and habit of prayer; to pass on the religious heritage of the race; to illumine ethical standards and to lend a transforming motive to ethical conduct.

So the questions with which this discussion is concerned become:

1. What concept of God can a preschool child develop? How can we help him, and what concept will be most helpful? Must we approach the question of death in our dealings with little children, and what can we tell them of immortality?

2. How can we teach children to pray, so that prayers will be vital and meaningful?

3. What, in the religious heritage of the race, is suitable mental content for preschool children?

4. Can the religious ideas of babyhood affect ethical conduct in the nursery?

Again be it said that this book offers no adequate answer to any one of these questions. It is merely intended to emphasize certain needs of little chil-

dren, and certain methods by which these needs may be met; to suggest a certain content of song and story and poem which seems especially helpful in the development of religious and ethical concepts; and to describe certain procedures, past and present, in the religious training of children, which the reader may evaluate for himself.

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CHILD LIFE AND RELIGION

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CHAPTER I

HOW SHALL WE ANSWER CHILDREN?

. . . "Then after the daddies and the mothers have children and grandchildren," soliloquized five-year-old John, "the daddies and the mothers die, and then the children grow up, and so on, and on, and on. Does it go on forever, mother? Doesn't the world ever die?"

Very easily may interested grown-ups overestimate the depth and importance of children's queries, forgetting that they are often asked merely to make conversation, or to attract father's or mother's attention. Yet it is nevertheless true that the questions of some very small children show a persistent interest in philosophical problems.

John, whose meditations opened this chapter, has been interested in such matters since he was very little. His ideas of God and his concern with the meaning of life and death are especially interesting because at no time have his parents made any effort to indoctrinate him with traditional beliefs. Two or three months before he was four years old, the word God came into his vocabulary, probably

through hearing it from a little friend who went to Sunday School. When John asked his mother about God, she told him that God gave us this beautiful world to live in, and reminded him of the many good things for which his parents were not responsible. She also told him that people were thankful to God, that they gave Him thanks for all the good He gives. John wanted to thank God, too. So he and his mother did so, practically every night thereafter. "Thank you, God, for such nice things," began all his earliest prayers.

At first, John insisted that his mother say a prayer *after* he did. Later, he preferred to offer his prayer last, and would sometimes say, "Now, don't tell God about the party, or that grandma is here" (or something else that pleased him)—"I want to tell Him." During this stage of his development, too, John wanted to know what God had for breakfast and where He slept. John's mother responded that she did not know whether God ate or slept, that she personally didn't think He needed to. She tried to explain that God lives in our hearts, that He puts the love there which John had already felt for his father and mother. For some time the boy insisted that God did eat and sleep, and his mother made no effort to contradict him. She simply went on emphasizing that God lives in our hearts, and that we see Him in all beautiful things. Within a few months John seemed to outgrow his first crude ideas, and to have accepted the notion of

God as love, and of His dwelling place as the human heart.

John learned of Jesus in connection with the Christmas celebration, and his mother told him something of what a fine boy and man Jesus was. John said that one day he wanted to see Jesus. In response to this, his mother told him that he might perhaps go to the country where Jesus had lived, but that Jesus did not live now as we live,—eating, and sleeping, and walking about. But Jesus' spirit, she went on to say, lives in the hearts of those who love Him. This discussion was the starting point of John's first conversation with his mother concerning death. Following upon it, they talked one day of how, when people grow up to be men and women, they have their own boys and girls, and then when they get old their bodies are worn out. Then, added John's mother, their spirits leave their worn out bodies, and go to live in the hearts of those that love them.

John mused over this notion of immortality for several weeks. The question which disturbed him was the one already quoted: Would there always be children? Would the world never die? To this his mother answered,

"We don't know what there will be after long, long, long times, but I am sure there will be children's hearts for us to live in for a very long time."

With this answer, John now seems satisfied.

In the second volume of his "*Child Psychology*"

Rasmussen, the Danish psychologist, has included some notes on the religious development of his own children which afford an interesting contrast to John's conversations with his mother.[1]

At the age of six years, five months, Rasmussen's daughter "R" remarked,

"I am thinking that when we die we shall live differently." Questioned by her mother as to what she meant, she responded,

"I don't mean when we die, but when all the people who are now alive on earth are dead; then perhaps the chairs will stand with their legs in the air, and we shall sleep underneath the beds."

How far this grotesque notion was the product of the little girl's unaided thinking, and how far her reasoning was influenced by the careless or ignorant conversation of servants or of other children, we can only conjecture. We may however be fairly certain that her musings did not cease at this point. Yet her mother is not recorded as having made any response to her comments, or exerted any effort to suggest a less distorted interpretation.

Like John, the Rasmussen children heard the name of God, and speculated as to His nature.

"Is God in the heart?" queried S, the younger child of the family.

"I don't know," answered his mother.

"Yes," insisted S, "He is; R said so. Isn't he?" [2]

[1] Rasmussen, Vilhem. *Child Psychology*. Knopf, New York, 1922, vol. III, p. 23.

[2] Rasmussen, op. cit., vol. II, p. 32.

To which the mother again replied, "I don't know."

"Yes," reiterated the child, "you do. You must tell me. Is He there, or isn't He?" The mother made no further answer.

One is constrained to admit the complete consistency with which this mother met her children's inquiries. On the other hand, one cannot infer from the records given that the results have been entirely satisfactory. Both children are described as being afraid of death, while at the same time very much interested in the subject. In more than one place the record of their comments shows that their notions were at times greatly confused in addition to being alarming.

Certainly the Rasmussens are guiltless of indoctrinating their children with any positive belief, nevertheless these children are acquiring a distinct philosophy, albeit that it is a negative one.

Furthermore, the little girl "R," at least, is conscious of the fact that the family interpretation of things is different from that of many other people.

"The rain comes from Our Lord," said R. "All the others say that, but *we* don't know Him." When "R" is older, she may perhaps express the situation thus: "We have a belief of our own. It is a denial of the beliefs of our neighbors."

There was once a theory, now discredited by modern child study, that reasoning ability is hardly present in the preschool period, develops but

slightly during the elementary school years, and then suddenly bursts into bloom with the coming of adolescence. According to this comfortable doctrine, children's questions might well be disposed of summarily by superficial answers, or by an occasional startled "That is something little children can't understand." Among other disquieting things, current psychology has taught us that there is no essential difference between the reasoning process of an adult and that of a little child. Discrepancies appear only in connection with the amount of experience which each brings to the solution of an intellectual problem. The adult has behind him years and years of living and learning in a perplexing world, which have given him a certain degree of skill in attacking a new situation. The child approaches his problem naively, but he arrives at its solution, crude though it may be, by precisely the same steps which the adult thinker follows.

Margaret, aged four and a half, was a very logical young person, inclined to speculation and most insistent upon adequate and definite answers to her questions. Margaret's mother, unlike John's, was eager to teach her small daughter the foundations of traditional Christian belief. To Margaret's reiterated question, "Where did I come from?" her mother responded, "from Heaven." Presently Margaret became curious about death. "Where," she asked her mother, "do we go when we die?"

"To Heaven," was the response.

"Did your grandmother go there when she died?" persisted the child.

"Why—yes, dear," replied the mother, with a degree of honest conviction.

"Mother, did you say I came from Heaven?"

"Yes, dear."

"And did you say your grandmother went to Heaven?"

"Yes."

"Funny. I don't remember seeing your grandmother."

Margaret's mother was puzzled, but she went on bravely, "There are some things, Margaret, which no one but God quite understands. All I can say is that God gave you to me, and that I believe my grandmother, who was a very good grandmother, is with Him in Heaven."

John's mother, R's mother, and Margaret's mother all answered these metaphysical questions of their small children with complete sincerity. Their philosophies differ, as does perhaps their understanding of child psychology. Some might criticize Margaret's mother as far too dogmatic, and not sufficiently aware of her small daughter's reasoning ability. Others might think "R's" mother dogmatic in her very agnosticism, while John's mother would surely meet with censure of the orthodox. But the integrity which is indispensable for a right relationship between parent and child can fairly be accorded to all. It will be helpful to

keep these anecdotes in mind in the further discussion of how we shall answer children.

Perhaps one might ask at this point, How important are our responses to metaphysical questions at the nursery age? The answer is written clearly in the new psychology. No longer do we believe that the basic attitudes which determine the happiness or distress, the success or failure, of the adult are mainly the product of mature reflection. Rather are we thoroughly convicted that such intimate adjustments are strongly influenced by early childhood impressions. "Give me a child until he is seven—" said a wise Jesuit, generations ago. And the psychologist of 1930 acknowledges his wisdom.

Very helpful to the consideration of this chapter's question is the psychological concept of "adjustment" as the goal of life and education. The well-adjusted person is recognized to be the person of dynamic, growing, ideals; of rich and stable emotional life. Childhood love of parents and family must reach out and expand into happy adjustments to playfellows and friends, to those of the opposite sex. Thus also we must believe that childhood ideas of God, childhood explanations of the difficult and baffling aspects of human existence, must grow with the growing personality. The Santa Claus notion affords an excellent parallel. When Santa becomes identified in the child's mind with *a* particular rosy and rotund old gentleman with a long white beard who drives reindeer and

mysteriously wriggles down people's chimneys, then as the child grows up Santa Claus stands for a fib of the adult population. At best, the story is looked upon in later years as an amusing yarn. At worst, it is thought of as a deliberate deception, the discovery of which is attended by pain. Greater or less distress attends disillusionment, according to the temperament of the child and the strength of feeling which has become associated with the Christmas celebration. But when children think of Santa as a spirit of loving and giving—a spirit with many, many helpers—then the delightful old saint becomes the symbol of the joyfullest of seasons. The story grows richer and richer in meaning as the years go by, and the crude Santa Claus figure is gradually merged in the older child's appreciation of the spirit of Christmas giving.

In all due reverence be it said that it is possible to follow either of the methods just described in helping the child to develop religious concepts, in trying to explain to him the mysteries of life. Carelessly trained, the child's notions may be crudely anthropomorphic, leading inevitably to later disillusionment. Religious education, consciously undertaken, implies the assumption that it is possible to help the child conceive an idea of God, and an interpretation of life and death and human striving, which shall expand and deepen with his growing insight.

There is an opinion now current among many

thoughtful people whose main interest lies in the field of religion, according to which little children's questions such as those recorded in this chapter assume great importance. This opinion is to the effect that the crying need of the time is for a fuller, richer, personal life. Rufus Jones writes, "Our present education is one-sided, pitifully neglectful of the inner life—the making of persons." [1] And again, . . . "very often the child's chance for a genuine religious life has been lost long before what we call his education has begun." Now the inner life, in the sense here used by Dr. Jones, and the personal religion to which he refers, grow through the deepening of appreciations—those appreciations the seeds of which lie in the young child's wonder and delight. From this standpoint it may be suggested that our answers to children's queries be so framed as to encourage wonder, and cultivate reverent thankfulness. "Thank you, God, for such things" then seems a happy opening for a nursery prayer. And an answer which stresses love as the imperishable element in a changing and bewildering universe becomes appropriate for a five-year-old who is concerned with immortality. Thoughtful reflection upon such an answer seems a safe starting point for the development of a personal religious life.

To the question "How shall we answer children?"

[1] *New Studies in Mystical Religion.* Macmillan, New York, 1927, p. 100.

there are, then, at the outset at least some partial replies which few will challenge. Any response to a child's question worthy of consideration must be sincere on the part of the adult who makes it. If one can answer nothing without losing one's own integrity, there is no course but silence. Yet it must be remembered that a refusal to answer does not stop the child's thinking, nor does it hinder him from hearing the opinions of other people,—wise or foolish, careful or careless, cynical or sincere. Such a course merely leaves him to push his way through crude and grotesque imaginings, to take or leave the bits of information supplied by the casual passer-by.

A wise answer is so given that it is susceptible of growth and reinterpretation through the continued reflection and experience of the developing personality. It is an answer which need never be contradicted, even though in the course of time it must be greatly expanded. Those whose own faith is unquestioning may give their children the assurance which is theirs, while still keeping this basic principle in mind. On the other hand, those whose "Credo" is characterized by greater or less confusion and uncertainty, and complicated by all the subtleties of an adult philosophy, may yet, for example, help their children to realize that God is a Spirit, by likening Him to the love which every child has felt in his own heart.

To deal adequately with the metaphysical ques-

tions of little children indeed requires faith, sincerity, sympathy, and good-will on the part of the adult. But in addition to these basic qualities there is also needed an intelligent understanding of the young child's mind.

CHAPTER II

THE CHILD'S INHERITANCE

To approach an understanding of the little child's mental processes it is wise to begin by considering his inheritance: what does he bring with him into the world, with which we may work or upon which we may build? How finally does heredity condition the heights of personality development, the depths of spiritual insight, to which the child may attain?

Many and various have been the answers to this question: "Our first parents being seduced by the subtility and temptation of Satan. . . ." states the Westminster Confession, ". . . . we are utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil. . . ." To which it is interesting to oppose the words of Rousseau: "Everything is good as it comes from the hands of God; everything degenerates in the hands of man."[1] "Every child at its birth possesses an individual temperament. . . . All its characters are good in themselves, for nature makes no mistakes." [2]

[1] Emile Garnier, Paris, p. 1.
[2] *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Garnier, Paris, p. 479.

In the days when people thought according to the Westminster Confession, not only religious education but the whole training of the child was concerned with saving his soul through the ruthless repression of all his natural impulses. On the other hand, Rousseau's doctrine, carried to its logical conclusion, would allow the full expression of every tendency, since according to his idea, all native tendencies are good.

Present day theory regards neither the one nor the other of these extreme viewpoints as tenable. The child's inherited tendencies are now looked upon as neither good nor bad in themselves, but rather as capacities which will prove helpful or harmful or neutral according to the way in which they are developed through education.

Any full discussion of the consensus of opinion concerning the relative importance of heredity and environment, of original nature and education, is of course quite beyond the province of this book. For our purposes we must be content with a rather over-simplified statement, hoping that it is near enough to the truth to be helpful. The reasonable assumption upon which modern education proceeds is that heredity—from the parents, from the forebears, from the species itself—sets the limit of development; while on the other hand, environment —social selection—determines its direction. That is to say, children are born with varying physical and mental endowment. There is a vast difference

among individuals in their capacity for both mental achievement and physical resistance. One cannot hope to make a scientist out of a child of low mental capacity, nor to develop a perfect physique in the congenitally handicapped. But whether the brilliant child shall excel in science or in letters is largely a matter of social selection, of the environment with which he is surrounded. On the other hand, whether the child of mediocre intelligence develops into a pleasant, well-adjusted personality, or whether because of repeated failures he becomes chronically unsuccessful and maladjusted, also depends upon the environment, upon the character of his guidance and education. It is highly probable that within the limits of our mental endowment no one of us achieves the full measure of his stature: the brilliant child does not reach the top limit of his mental capacity, nor does the less gifted child attain the utmost of his lesser endowment. We are a long way from perfection in either the knowledge or the technique needed to develop each child's native gifts so that his best possibilities are realized.

The child's inheritance, be it rich or meagre, includes an asset which is beyond price, and which tends to decrease with increasing age unless it be wisely conserved. This asset is his extreme sensitiveness to impressions—his great plasticity. Modern psychology recognizes this plasticity as an active, not a passive, character. The child is not clay to

be moulded, nor a tablet upon which the mature may inscribe the results of their wisdom and experience. His is a highly sensitive, active organism, receiving impressions from without but remaking them according to its own nature. The chief task of education is not to impress upon this delicate, growing consciousness a rigid pattern which will dull its keen perceptions, but rather to maintain the plasticity which, rightly understood, is nothing less than the power to keep on growing. The richness of the birthright varies,—not all are endowed with the same sensitivity. But our aim should be to jealously guard for each child his share. Indeed, the neurologist, Dr. Herrick, writes: "We who seek to enter the kingdom of knowledge and to continue to advance therein must not only become as little children, but we must learn to continue so. The problem of scientific pedagogy is essentially this: to prolong the plasticity of childhood. . . ." [1] The greatest Teacher of all time related this truth to the things of the Spirit when he said: "Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven."

The specific inherited tendencies of this highly sensitive organism which is the newborn child are variously described by different authorities in the field of psychology. In some of the older books on the subject, one finds long lists of "instincts," and

[1] Herrick, C. Judson. *Introduction to Neurology*. Saunders, Philadelphia, 1918, p. 351. Quoted in Forest, Preschool Education. Macmillan, N. Y., 1927, p. 202.

the question is therefore often asked whether there be a "religious instinct." The answer is that there is little or no evidence for the existence of such an inherited predisposition. But although he is probably not possessed of any directly religious tendency, the child is born with certain fundamental urges or "feelings" which, under guidance, develop into religious interests and conduct. These urges make it possible for him to behave in certain ways—they are the well-springs which lend driving power to his inherited capacities, for good or for ill.

Now the inherited equipment upon which we may count in considering religious, or indeed general, education, is in substance this: a capacity for social behavior, a capacity for a curious investigation of the environment, and a capacity for throwing the whole self into any activity which arouses spontaneous interest. The first of these—the capacity for behaving socially, for reacting sympathetically to people,—is obviously the basis of all human relationships, and in its earliest appearance it sharply distinguishes the human infant from the young of any other species. Actually, there are many similarities between the human baby and the baby chimpanzee, but, writes Dr. Gesell, "transcending . . . that similarity is a generalized conditionability and a response to other personalities, to which man is special heir. . . . Herein lies his humanity. This humanity does not wait for upright

posture and speech. It is present at birth."[1] The normal baby is sensitive to other human beings, he responds to their moods and returns affection for the comfort and the care which people give to him. His world is a very narrow one, his chief concern is for his own well-being, but his horizon almost immediately widens to include at least the people who are responsible for his comfort. Normally his parents are the first to be included within the bounds of his affection, and his first strong social tie is therefore the filial one.

One sees easily enough the importance of these earliest human relationships as a starting point for one aspect of the religious life. The most natural way for a child to build the concept of God is by endowing Him with the attributes of human parents. God takes care of us, God gave us everything, God watches over all the world—just as fathers and mothers take care of their children, give them what they need, watch over what they do. Of course the child does not do all this by himself—he does not create the Deity out of his unaided imagination, and then proceed to think of Him as possessing the traits of a father. But if he hears any reverent mention of God whatsoever, such is the picture the child naturally draws. His mother tells him that God made all things, and more than likely

[1] Gesell, Arnold, *Infancy and Human Growth*. Macmillan, New York, 1928, p. 354.

if she prays in the child's hearing, she addresses "Our Father, Who art in Heaven."

So closely is the beginning of religious feeling related to the child's feeling for his parents that M. Bovet, of the Institute J. J. Rousseau, takes as the fundamental thesis of his book, "The Child's Religion," [1] "the identity of the religious and the filial sentiment." In his discussion M. Bovet reminds his readers that as there is in filial affection an element of fear, as well as an element of love, so in religion we have two apparently irreconcilable emotional attitudes: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom" . . . "Perfect love casteth out fear."

Unfortunately it is indeed true that there easily enters into the relationship between the child and his parents an element of fear. Fear of displeasure, fear of punishment, fear of a loss of protection. Quite as easily does the element of fear enter into the child's idea of God. The "All-seeing Eye" is not a comfortable concept, such an Eye would view too many punishable acts. That fear of the Lord which the sage of old recognized as the beginning of wisdom is all too readily implanted in the youthful mind. Because this fear is akin to the fear of parental displeasure, just as the love of God is akin to filial love, the tendency is for the small child to build an idea of the Infinite beset with the many

[1] *The Child's Religion.* Trans. by George Green. Dutton, New York, 1928.

limitations of his parents. The "perfect love which casteth out fear" is realized in only a few cases as between parents and children, therefore, when the concept of God is exclusively a father concept, perfect love is difficult or impossible for the child to achieve. Yet it is from the seed of affection for those who attend to his human needs that any love of God or any devotion to humanity must grow. Here then is one of the fundamental problems of religious education—as Bovet expresses it, "to lead the child in the royal way of Liberty," building upon the emotion of love and avoiding so far as possible the sense of fear and restraint.

In addition to the early expressions of love and fear, there are some other aspects of the child's inherited capacity for social behavior which bear upon the problem of religious education. First among these one might mention what certain psychologists have called "the instinct for submission." As a consequence of his utter dependence upon others, and the feeling of security which results from having all his decision, as it were, made for him, there easily grows up in the child a pleasure in being dominated. This tendency leads him to welcome the idea of a Supreme Being, far, far more powerful than the child's parents, to Whom one is asked to give uttermost obedience. Now reasoned acceptance of a restraint which comes from within, not abject self-abasement, is the aim of any wholesome religious education. But self-abasement is a

deep-rooted human tendency, easily developed to an unwholesome degree, which must be reckoned with from the beginning in the religious training of children.

Self-abasement is balanced in the normal personality by a compensating urge toward mastery or domination. In the days of the Westminster Confession, this tendency was probably repressed more violently than any other. The child's will must be broken, otherwise no good could come of him. In this enlightened age, when so much has been said and written about the child's need for self-expression, probably his urge toward mastery still gets him into more difficulties with both grown people and children than any other native tendency. But now at least we appreciate how important this tendency is for the development of the normal, wholesome personality, and our method is to redirect, rather than to repress.

Considered from the point of view of religious education, the drive for mastery is the motive force from which grows the power to control oneself and one's circumstance in the interest of one's highest ideal. Run amuck, it easily becomes unpleasant domination. Guided and directed, it supplies the energy for that effort and service which constitute active participation in the will of God.

The child's capacity for social behavior gives him the desire and the power to imitate the activities of others. This power has always been used, and some-

times sadly misused, in the education of the young. It is as great an asset in religious training as it is elsewhere. Probably the child learns much of religious feeling from observing and imitating the posture and attitudes of his elders; since it is claimed that he may learn fear from the muscle tension of his mother while he is held in her arms,[1] it is reasonable to think that he may learn a reverent attitude from observing and imitating one.

Thus the emotional growth which results from increasing human contacts provides the background for that specific variety of emotional culture which we call religious. Love of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of humanity, reverence for the God and Father of Jesus Christ, these take their rise in the child's earliest affections for those who are nearest to him. In the child's capacity for a curious investigation of his environment we find the source of his questions, disconcerting and otherwise, which provide the natural starting points for any religious instruction it may seem wise to give. Concerning this interest of the child in intellectual investigation, a recent writer has said: "This explorative tendency is sometimes useful, sometimes destructive, but without it man would not have progressed far. Instead of sighing at the approach of the day when the

[1] See Blanton, S., and Blanton, M. *Child Guidance*. Century Co., New York, 1927.

child begins to show marked curiosity, the parent should welcome the child's interest in his surroundings as a sign of developing intelligence." [1] The uttermost limits of this developing intelligence are, as we have seen, set by the child's inheritance. But its direction and its bent are highly susceptible to the influence of his environment, and it cannot be repeated too often that the uttermost limits are themselves seldom, if ever, reached.

Enthusiasm is indispensable for happiness and success. There is no one more completely enthusiastic than the child of nursery age. He can throw himself with entire whole-heartedness into what he is doing. When he is strong and well, he is capable of endlessly engaging in activity for its own sake, regardless of any external end. We call this almost ceaseless activity of childhood play—and at this late date in the world's history we have at last come to appreciate its value. In former times play was regarded at best with suspicion. Puritan fathers and mothers thought of it as positively sinful, one of the vicious traits of that perverted nature inherited from our first parents. More lenient folk tolerated a certain amount of it as a necessary concession to human frailty. Modern education sees it as the child's prime means for growth and self-development. The poet and the philosopher realized the dignity of play long before the educator.

[1] Faegre, M., and Anderson, J. *Child Care and Training.* University of Minnesota Press, 1930, p. 169.

Schiller writes earnestly of "Das tiefer sinn in kind'chen spiel."

Several elaborate efforts have been made to explain the meaning of play. Groos saw in it a provision of nature whereby the child learned, through playful dramatization, to engage in those social activities which would be required of him in adult life. Schiller and Spencer saw it as a means of releasing excess energy. G. Stanley Hall interpreted it as "the motor habits and spirit of the past of the race, persisting in the present." McDougall holds that the motive of rivalry is responsible for play activity. Actually, there is no need for justifying play in any such artificial fashion. Its dignity as the one form of activity other than that of the creative artist which is indulged in for no ulterior motive, needs no further apology. To understand and catch the spirit of pure play is to solve the problem of guiding little children, in religion, or in any other field of education.

Play in this sense of the word is very different from "fooling," or idle amusement. When one says that the spirit of play should enter into the child's conception of God one means something very different from the current custom of making Sunday School endurable, even amusing, by throwing in a little *divertissement* in the way of a few games or a bit of handwork. One simply means that the child's experience of God should, ideally, be as vivid and as natural and as delightful as his own spon-

taneous imaginings. One also means that experiences of going to church, or talking about God with mother, or going to Sunday School should be as simply delightful and as free from artificial restraint as any play activity. So may the child best learn the "Perfect love, which casteth out fear."

Then the child's inheritance, so far as we may tell, includes no specific religious instinct, no innate knowledge of God as the ages have described Him. Rather is his birthright a highly sensitive organism, destined to receive impressions and remake them according to the especial genius of its own individuality. This organism is endowed to a degree which distinguishes it from any other species with certain capacities—for love, for thought, for enthusiasm. Out of these gifts must develop the Fruits of the Spirit.

CHAPTER III

PERSONALITY AT THE NURSERY AGE

"Psychology," writes Goodwin B. Watson, "endeavors to set before teachers the laws through which God works in the human spirit. God does not work clearly and regularly in one realm—mysteriously and capriciously in another." [1]

The study of child psychology was hampered for a very long while by the fact that some people thought the systematic observation of children violated the respect due the human soul. This prejudice was particularly strong with regard to any investigation of moral and religious development—a peculiarly sacred precinct, upon which cold scientific thinking might least of all impinge. But nowadays, most of us are ready to accept Goodwin Watson's position.

So much has been written and said about the psychology of early childhood during the last few years, and such differing viewpoints are represented in even the most "popular" books on the subject, that it is not easy to choose and organize,

[1] *Case Studies for Teachers of Religion.* Association Press, New York, 1926, p. 268.

within the limits of a brief chapter, the material which is especially pertinent to religious education. The best plan seems to be to return to the inherited capacities to love, to think, and to act wholeheartedly, described in the last chapter, and discuss very briefly some of the things we know about how these capacities develop during the years of early childhood.

When one asks, "What does the baby love during the first days and weeks of his life?" common sense and analytic psychology alike respond, "himself." He loves his own comfort—to be warm, to rest softly, to take food. However, what mere common sense has learned from the psychoanalyst is that back of this self-centered absorption lies a tremendous driving power—the urge, name it what one will, which forces the child on from the utter dependence which marks him at birth to the independent life which is his destiny. The goal of all education, either general or specifically religious, is to help the young achieve independence; one must, however, qualify the word *independence* so that it stands for something other than its usual connotation, for in the sense here intended it is the reverse of selfish isolation. True independence includes the power to face the realities of life squarely, as a self-directing person, joined to the ability to live and grow and work happily with other people. For human beings are so constituted that they cannot live and grow alone.

When one pauses to think of the immense driving power which this first "love" possesses, one realizes how needful it is that it shall find an outlet. Fortunately, such an outlet is provided in all but the most tragic situations by the presence of fathers and mothers or other devoted adults who take care of the child and receive in return the first expressions of affection directed toward anyone outside his own self.

For people sufficiently interested in children to read this book it is hardly necessary to dilate upon the preeminent importance of these earliest affections, the tragedy of their denial, and the need for wise response on the part of nurses and parents. Closely allied though it is to a selfish, although altogether healthy, desire to get what the organism wants, we must nevertheless remember that this outgoing drive toward others is the beginning of all affection. Perhaps it is also unnecessary to remind the reader again that this early affection is easily misused, over-played, and that the result of such mistakes is an arrest of the child's normal progress toward independence.

Now the general course of emotional development is through a process of transfer; in the beginning, the child reacts strenuously to a whole situation; by and by, the reaction occurs without the whole situation being needed to call it forth. One or two elements of the original happening are enough stimulus. First the baby reacts joyfully to

being held and fed; soon the mere sight of his mother's face calls forth delight. Unfortunately he learns to extend his emotions of fear and anger in the same way. Something which he has once liked may be converted into stimulus calling forth fear or anger through becoming associated with a terrifying or enraging experience, the reason for the change being as a rule unknown alike to himself and to his elders.

As the child extends the range of his emotional responses they tend to become graded, from the all-or-none, mad-or-glad-all-over reactions of the very small child, to the less intense responses of the older one. This grading of responses is one of the indices of maturity.

Very important for our discussion is an understanding of the conflicts which are bound to arise as the child grows older, as his wants increase, and as these wants bring him in opposition to the people surrounding him. These conflicts are, of course, inevitable, but the way in which they are met and dissolved during the child's earliest years is a very vital factor in his later development. Educationally, our aim is to help him face them squarely, as part of the reality to which he must adjust. His tendency, which is the tendency of all of us, is to dodge the difficulty and to find a compromise solution which will help him to both "eat his cake and have it." He grows, as indeed we all grow, through beginning to realize that the cake which

is eaten is gone, and gone because he himself ate it.

Let us consider the bearing of these concepts upon the problem of religious education. First of all the urge for satisfying one's own wants—how does religious training deal with this driving power? One method is the way of the Westminster Confession, to teach the child that his urges are wrong, contrary to God's will; that the way of salvation is the way of self-denial. Another method is to teach the optimistic doctrine that God always deals with people in the right way, that God will always take care of the child, and that all the child needs to do is to ask God, as he would his own father, for that which he wishes.[1] Still another method is to teach consideration for the wants and feelings of others which makes restraint imperative. Now the first of these ways, as we have learned too well, easily ends in unwholesome repressions which are the seeds of difficulty in the child's later life. The second borders on a Pollyanna philosophy, and, what is more serious, tends to arrest the child's concept of God on the level of an endlessly bountiful father who is a sort of wizard, and will always twist affairs so that they are arranged according to the individual's selfish comfort. Such an idea of God is, of course, foredoomed to bitter disillusionment, besides easily leading to a thorough-going and permanent rejection of religion on the ground that things did not "come true." The third procedure,

some may remark, is not especially the way of religious education—all wise parents and good teachers would try to teach the child to inhibit his own selfish desires in the interests of others. Perhaps this is true. But, nevertheless, one can see how wise religious training might be helpful in this aspect of personality development. There is, for example, the interpretation suggested by John's mother, that God is a spirit, dwelling within the human heart. He cares not only for one individual, but for all men. His will is that men live happily together, His indwelling power helps them to do so, if they call upon It.

Can this religious sanction, this habit of calling upon a strength which is within, be developed at the nursery age? Perhaps not to any extent, with the average child. But certainly to some degree with most. Young John, for instance, found it very hard to adjust to nursery school during the first few days, because it meant leaving his mother. John's small brother, Thomas, accompanied him to school, and they both cried the greater part of the first sessions. On the evening of the first day upon which John succeeded in controlling his tears, he spontaneously prayed, "Thank you, God, for helping me not to cry in school today. But, oh, God—you forgot to help Thomas."

Again, when the small brother Thomas was four years, one month old, the following conversation was recorded:

Said Thomas to his father and mother, "We stole some candies one day." To which father responded, "I don't think much of that," while mother added the question, "Weren't you sorry?"

"Yes," admitted Thomas.

"Didn't you think in yourself that it wasn't the best thing to do?" pursued mother.

"Yes. God told me so. He can see everything, and He saw me. He told me to put it back, and I did."

So far as anyone who knows Thomas can tell, this was his own idea. It surely seems to show a connection in his four-year-old mind between his conception of God and his ethical standards.

Turning to the question of conflict, to that opposition of individual will to socially imposed requirements which is so fruitful a source of unhappiness and pain, one easily sees that religious training may be helpful here in the case of the older child. On the nursery level, too, one *may* achieve something, if John and Thomas are at all fair representatives of the young child's thinking. If right and honest and generous conduct has been identified successfully with the carrying out of the will of God Who dwells within, then the teaching concerning God may help the child face reality. Too easily, however, the reverse is true, and the youngster seizes upon the concept of "the voice of God in his heart" as a way out of his dilemma. "Why did you take the cookies, Jack?" asks mother. "That's all right, mother. *God* told me to do it," responds

Jack happily. The voice of God within the heart is a concept to be developed with discretion.

The phenomenon of transference or the way in which the feeling evoked in one experience may color subsequent experiences, bears very careful consideration with reference to religious training. When one remembers that this process is going on constantly in the life of the young child, and then considers how easily we adults lose track of its direction because of our imperfect understanding of the three-and-four-year-old mind, one finds much food for reflection. On the positive side, if religious education is to be a constructive influence, then all experiences of religious teaching, visiting church, and the like, should be accompanied so far as possible by a feeling of happiness and confidence. On the negative side, vague or frightening concepts must be guarded against at every turn. Actual fear often results from ill-advised religious teaching—a fear which not only inhibits and destroys the very things for which religious education is striving, but which has also been found to account for many other strange terrors. The concept of God as All-Seeing is not altogether comforting, and may be terrifying. Mrs. Mumford [1] quotes a little boy who was afraid of the dark. His mother told him he needn't be afraid—for God could see him even in the dark. "Oh mother," he said, "please take God

[1] Mumford, Edith Read. *The Dawn of Religion in the Mind of the Child*. Longmans Green, London, 1921. See p. 25.

away and leave the light." Another small boy thought of God as an All-Seeing Eye, and a voice which said, "I see you, and I'm after you."

These are not exaggerations, but fairly frequent occurrences. They are significant as signs of love and fear reactions which the child is setting up, and which cannot fail to influence the trend of his whole life. Wise religious teaching may help him to worthy love objects, and encourage him to quiet confidence. But wisdom, and the understanding of how very, very easily the small child may misinterpret, and may set up a most destructive attitude, are indispensable for wholesome teaching.

The young child, then, is a sensitive and at first wholly self-centered organism, whose great driving urge is love; the task of education is to help this urge find wholesome and legitimate expression. The particular concern of religious training is to direct it toward objects consistent with the highest ideals of the race, and to do this without engendering fear concepts, the unwholesome "fear of the Lord" which inhibits, and which is the beginning of disintegration rather than the beginning of wisdom.

Guiding the personality development of young children is made difficult by the fact that grown people do not understand the young child's thinking. So like ours, and yet so unlike, it takes real effort on our part fully to appreciate the child's point of view. At one moment we are amazed by the logic and astuteness of his reasoning, at another

we are astounded by his complete disregard of anything which we would consider proof. Often we are aghast at his "lack of feeling"—his utter inability to grasp what seems to us to be the significance of a situation.

Several instances of quite complete logical thinking on the part of small children have already been mentioned. Margaret's search for proof concerning the accuracy of her mother's statement, John's concern to carry an idea once perceived to its ultimate conclusion, are quite on a par with adult reasoning.

On the other hand, even children so mentally mature as these will show many inconsistencies. Especially because we sometimes encounter such good thinking at the nursery age, are we prone to judge children harshly when they "tell stories," and we are all too ready to brand these stories as "lies." It is most annoying too for adults when children insist upon impossible statements—manifestly not true to fact, and made simply on the basis of what the child would *like* to have true.

There was once a little girl, the daughter of a minister, who told a great many "stories." Occasionally they were plain "whoppers"—told to get out of the consequences of a misdeed. Really, however, this small girl once voiced a reflection which was very close to the fact. Her mother remarked sadly, "Mary, I don't see how my little girl *can* tell such stories."

"Why mother," said Mary, "it's just as *easy*."

And it is. The reasons why it is are fairly apparent to the psychologist.

In the first place, the child's powers of perception, of representing mentally that which he has experienced, are immature, poorly developed. Accurate observation, careful description, require training. This is the case because children's sensory experience is very limited, and their attention essentially brief and fleeting. "Left to themselves, their perceptions are hazy, incomplete, and inaccurate," write Norsworthy and Whitley.[1]

For these reasons, the imaginative life of the child is different from that of adults. It will be interesting, here, to distinguish two types of imagination, productive and reproductive. Reproductive imagination is the process whereby we imagine something which we have experienced in the world of reality—a lovely white farm house, perhaps, in the midst of rolling green fields. Productive imagination is the process whereby we combine actual sensory experiences in such a way that we build the image of what we have never seen. For example, we may imagine a castle of burnished silver set among rosebushes. As grown people, we distinguish easily between the fruits of these two sorts of imagination. We have had ample experience, and we know when we are picturing something which

[1] Norsworthy, N. and Whitley, M. *Child Psychology*. Macmillan, New York, 1913.

corresponds to actuality, and when we are merely indulging our fancy to create a picture which in all probability cannot be duplicated in the external world. Not so the young child. Limited in his sensory experiences, hazy in his perceptions, a silver castle easily becomes as real to him as a homely farm house, and he will insist that he has seen the former with as much conviction as he will tell of seeing the latter.[1]

Now the meaning of this for religious education is very clear. We recognize that it is to the productive imagination, wisely trained, that we look for creative work, in literature, in art, in science. Again it is the productive imagination which makes it possible to take daring leaps into the future, picturing for ourselves the destiny of man, and the nature of God. Remembering how very active is the imagination of the child,—and how limited his experience—the need for wise guidance becomes very apparent. The great asset which productive imagining may be in building a vital, wholesome religious life is no less obvious than the ease with which it may lead to grotesque, even horrifying, images. What one hopes to accomplish through intelligent training is to associate beautiful imagery with religion, and to avoid the formation of too concrete images, through associating God with love and with spirit rather than endowing Him with a definite form, human or superhuman.

[1] See Arlitt, *Psychology of Infancy and Early Childhood*. Chapt. X.

Children's reasoning, as Piaget has shown,[1] is hampered by their general immaturity, their narrowness of interest, their tendency to ego-centricity. The young child sees no need for proof, no obligation to demonstrate the validity of his conclusions to you or to me. What pleases him, is for his purposes acceptable. His thinking often shows a lack of respect for logical necessity. He likewise exhibits a tendency to "syncretism" or the indiscriminate relating of everything to everything else, while on the other hand he frequently runs to juxtaposition, or a careless, loose type of logical relation in which nothing is related to anything else.

The third of the inherited capacities of which we have been thinking,—the child's enthusiasm, his willingness to throw himself wholeheartedly into an activity which engages his spontaneous attention—probably explains his occasional demonstration of real reasoning ability.

Dewey has shown that the essence of logical thinking is the occurrence of a real problem, which grips the thinker. A problem requiring solution—either because some outside set of circumstances needs to be mastered, or because there has arisen within the mind a gripping question—is the starting point of real intellectual activity. The young child experiences problems—the more gifted he is mentally, the more he sees. They range upward

[1] Piaget, J. *The Language and Thought of the Child.* Harcourt Brace, New York, 1927.

from the case of the baby who, with a toy in each hand, is confronted with a third toy which he would like to hold. Three toys—two hands. What can the baby do? At a higher level we have Margaret's dilemma. She came from heaven, great-grandmother went to heaven. Why didn't they meet? The bright baby puts down one toy. Or perhaps he tries to grasp the third toy in his arms. Margaret asked a question, and took the answer as a temporary solution. Just then no other solution was possible, temporarily it satisfied. Herein lies the purpose of real thinking. The difficulty must be mastered; some solution, some point of rest must be met. Now the mastery of difficulty requires perseverance, that patient attention which is so foreign to the young child *except* it be involuntarily caught and held. When children persist in abstract thinking, starting with a real difficulty, working through and trying out suggestions for removing it, and reaching a conclusion more or less satisfying, it is because their involuntary attention has been caught and held, and their enthusiasm has carried them forward toward their goal. When children "jump" to immature conclusions, they do so because of their meagre experience and relative callousness to the need for reflection, because of the very self-centered character of their interest, and because of their tendency to project into the scheme of reality that which exists actually because of their wish alone.

The picture, then, of the nursery personality which we may draw for our present purposes is that of extreme immaturity which, rightly understood, is an asset, not a liability As Dewey expresses it, immaturity means capacity for growth. This immaturity shows itself in an egocentricity only gradually overcome, a picture of the real world inaccurate because of lack of experience, a productive imagination which needs infinitely careful guidance, because it is the main factor in both creation and disintegration; and a capacity for thought which can be engaged and developed because of the power of enthusiasm—once this enthusiasm is enlisted. The function of religious education thus becomes to lead the developing personality toward more and more worthy love objects; to help the child face reality as it is; to guide the productive imagination in such a way that images shall be beautiful, not grotesque. And, even though one may think of the Eternal God as merely a projection of the human mind, one may yet help to make that projection of a sort that stands to the child as a challenge for achievement,—not as an unwholesome escape from conflict.

CHAPTER IV

CONCERNING TEACHING

In this generation the art of teaching has come into its own. The story of its development and of how people have come to appreciate the skill it represents is a fascinating chapter in the history of education. A hundred years ago few parents would have questioned a teacher's method, provided he pounded a certain amount of "book learning" into the heads of his pupils. Fifty years later the general public was hardly more critical, while the careful ways of dealing with children which intelligent communities now demand of teachers have many of them been developed during the last two decades. The most marked changes have occurred in connection with the teaching of younger children. Once the most neglected of all classes of pupils, in the better schools of today they enjoy the advantage of especially well-tried methods. This reversal of policy is due to the discovery that learning is an active matter, so far as the pupil is concerned, and to the conviction that the child's earliest reactions are of the greatest importance for his character and education.

The purpose of this chapter is to put before the reader some of the basic principles of modern progressive education, and to show their bearing upon the special problems of religious training. "How shall we choose what to teach, out of our rich store of inherited culture? And how shall we teach it?" are questions which religious and general education must alike face and attempt to answer.

In his essay "The Child and the Curriculum," Professor John Dewey has presented in masterly fashion the distinction between the old and the new point of view in selecting what shall be taught. Very briefly the difference might be summed up in this way: the old curriculum was selected as so much static material to be, as it were "poured into" the child. The new curriculum is regarded as a series of graded experiences which will give the active, growing organism "grist for its mill"—nourishment for its growth processes. The question is not "How much arithmetic or reading *can* we force upon an eight-year-old child?" Or "How many Mother Goose rhymes *can* we teach a four-year-old?" It becomes rather "How much reading and arithmetic can an eight-year-old use in carrying on his own purposes?" "How many memorized nursery rhymes, if indeed any, will help the four-year-old to live more happily and effectively?" For the new education looks upon arithmetic and reading and history and the rest not as so much information to be, as it were, "poured in," but as so many

vital experiences through which the child may grow in wisdom and in stature. Learning is recognized to be synonymous with reacting.

Contrary to popular opinion, modern education respects book learning as profoundly as did ever the most conservative—not, indeed, in and for itself, but for what it can do to help people grow, for what it means in the development of character. The good character, the continually growing person, is the aim of the progressive school's activities. Literary training is but a means towards this end.

So to the question "What shall we teach?" in any given subject at any given age, the progressive school answers, "That which will be most effective in helping the child to grow during this year of his life." This is something very different from the notion that the newer schools teach the child only what he wishes at the moment. In a class lecture Dr. Kilpatrick once expressed the matter thus: "We do not care to have the child do as he wishes—we want him to wish what he does." We want him to react fully and favorably to his school experience, for as much of the time as possible. And we believe that he will do so only if this experience—of arithmetic, of language, of history, or whatever—fulfills his present need.

In general education the newer theory of how to choose what shall be taught has resulted in a radical revision of the different courses of study. Material unsuited to children's needs, and above all

material quite unsuited to present community needs, has been eliminated to give place to experiences which really help the child to grow, which give him the knowledge and the skill he requires to adjust himself to the world as he finds it, effectively and happily. In progressive schools we no longer teach Least Common Multiple and Highest Common Divisor nor apothecaries' measures. But we distinctly want the child to understand the transactions involved in the use of a checking account. For whereas apothecaries' measures do not enter into his experience at all, understanding how to keep a check-book, among other things, may make him at once more reasonable about expenditures, since it will help him appreciate the fact that father's checking account is not an inexhaustible well. From the same point of view, too, is the history of the past taught less for its own sake than for its value in interpreting present problems. Nothing is really learned until it has entered the stream of the child's experience and remade his life, be it ever so slightly. Whatever is effectively taught contributes to those habits, ideals and attitudes which are the stuff of which character is made.

Of late years in the field of religion the standards of modern curriculum making have also been applied, though less rigidly. The needs of children are on the whole less effective here in determining what shall be taught. Reasons for this difference are not far to seek. The sanctions for religious

teaching, and the emotional coloring supplied by these sanctions, are so intense that clear thinking is easily inhibited. Nevertheless, especially in the liberal Protestant communions, some rather searching studies of content, method and results, are now being made.

The main impetus toward a revision of what young children shall be taught in the field of religion has come from the great wave of enthusiasm for "Social Christianity," with its emphasis upon the Christ-like life as the aim of religious teaching. The "new theology of the social gospel" even partially apprehended would inevitably make parents and teachers ask, "What social ideals, what capacity for real effort toward the coming of the kingdom of God upon earth, does the average child acquire through conventional religious teaching?"

Professor George Albert Coe is the great exponent of the social gospel in its implications for religious training. In his book "A Social Theory of Religious Eucation," Dr. Coe writes . . . "from this point of view the aim of religious education becomes growth of the young toward and into mature and efficient devotion to the democracy of God, and happy self-realization therein." [1] According to this theory, we should look toward service, toward really worth-while projects in helping others, for the main content of religious training. This very

[1] Coe, George Albert. *A Social Theory of Religious Education.* Scribners, New York, 1917, p. 55.

sane and wholesome emphasis makes it possible to reduce the problem of religious education to terms of definite habits, skills, and ideals which one might hope to form in children, and holds the possibility of a definite study of the religion of service. It is, however, perhaps less effective on the side of that development of the inner life which Rufus Jones describes as "the building of persons," in the developing of that quiet collection of inner resources, born of thankfulness and reverence, which makes for the well-adjusted personality. And, indeed, Dr. Coe warns us that liberalism in religious education "makes for ethical clarity, but easily fails of ethical fervor . . . opens the way to the most vital materials and methods of instruction, but encounters the danger of intellectualism." [1]

Whatever one's predilection as to forms of worship, whatever one's shade of liberalism or dogmatism, whatever one's theory of the God Whose Kingdom Christ prayed might come upon the earth, one can well appreciate the need for the searching criterion of service as a measure of religious sincerity. A rich source, then, of teaching material for home and school may be found in a study of the needs of others—needs some of which even the littlest child can understand and try to help fill.

However, for the most part, people who are interested in specifically "religious" education feel the need of turning to other sources, of finding fur-

[1] Ibid., pp. 338-340.

ther content. This other content is harder to select, and far, far more difficult of adjusting to the needs of the young child. As an illustration of the difficulties involved in choosing this content, a study by Dr. Angus MacLean, entitled "The Idea of God in Protestant Education," [1] is extremely interesting. As the title of his thesis states, Professor MacLean's problem was to study the way in which the idea of God was presented to the Protestant child, and to estimate so far as possible the results of such presentation. In the course of his work, this writer found little evidence of an attempt to treat the subject systematically, and he states that "Protestant teaching on this subject may be characterized as a confusion of incompatible and contradictory notions." Referring especially to the teaching of younger children, Professor MacLean thinks that the usual method of presentation implies a definite knowledge of God on the part of the treacher which must lead to crude concrete imagery on the part of the pupil. He thinks also that the prevailing over-emphasis of God's fatherly protection, in the face of nature, "red in tooth and claw," results in the concept of "a God Whose reputation does not square with His acts." In the conclusion of his work, Professor MacLean writes, "Perhaps the one need of which the writer is most conscious . . . is for some reliable experimentation to determine how much theology and what portions of theology can

[1] Teachers College, Columbia University, 1930.

be given to primary children with promise of better results than have been discovered." And, he adds, "Is gradation of Christian theology in terms of the child's experience possible?"

Of course the answer to this last question from the position of modern educational theory is, "to the degree that such gradation is impossible, theology is unsuitable subject matter for small children." Admittedly, such gradation is difficult and holds many pitfalls, but, holding in mind the assumptions about the child's inheritance and the character of the small child's thinking discussed in preceding chapters, it seems that far better gradation may be attained in the future than has been in the past. Indeed, the present writer believes that in many homes and some Sunday School classes and graded lesson series, much is even now being accomplished toward this end.

In determining the content of religious education, no arbitrary list of steps in procedure can be of real value. But a general course is clear. As in general education, there must first be tentatively decided what are the habits, the skills, the ideals, which constitute "religion," and at what age it is possible to help children acquire them. On the other hand, it is necessary to study the content which historic religion places at our disposal, and estimate its value in terms of child experience. This content must not be regarded as so much static tradition, but as vital material to enrich the life of

the spirit. Which of the Bible stories will help the child's concept of an indwelling God Who is Love? At what age will he have a need for the "skill" of a memorized psalm or prayer to enrich his simple petitions and thanksgivings? When can he begin to love and appreciate the character of Jesus? Of Buddah? Of Francis of Assisi? How soon in life can a child begin to form ideals of self-giving, of justice, of love? How early can one sense the peace which passeth all understanding? According to the way we answer these questions should we choose song and story, prayer and worship, acts of service and of sacrifice, that may truly enter the child's life to transform it.

Now actually, this course of procedure in deciding what experiences we shall bring to the child, if we truly understand it, determines the method by which we can best teach. This is the method of purposeful child activity described by Professor Kilpatrick as the "project method." The essential element of the "project method" is the child's purposeful act, carried on in a social setting. In religious education especially is this purpose, this desire of the child to plan and carry out and judge an activity of his own, indispensable for any real teaching.

Unfortunately the term "project method" has been grievously misunderstood by many people. More than one teacher of the Sunday School kin-

dergarten class probably still feels she has achieved "project teaching" by introducing pasting and hand-work and plays and parties in bewildering confusion. One would not imply that these activities *may* not be projects, if the children engage in them whole-heartedly. But they *need* not be projects,—and it is a big question whether at best they mark any real development of the child's religious life.

This confusion as to what constitutes a "project" is natural enough, when one realizes how hard it is to keep children interested and purposeful in the memory work and hymn singing which used to occupy so much of the time given to their so-called "religious" training in both home and Sunday School. Certainly hand-work creates more enthusiasm in the small child, who glories in physical activity, than sitting still for a long period and repeating memory verses. But the child *may* purpose to listen to a story, or even to learn a part of a prayer, if it be well chosen and well presented, and if it does not demand his sitting still for too long a time. The present writer believes that well chosen stories, prayers that the child makes for himself, and verses that he wants to memorize mean far more in the development of his religious life than the typical Sunday School hand-work project—*unless* this hand-work project is directed toward an end which he appreciates and understands. The child's own purpose may be overlooked just as much in the busy

bustle of a hand-work period as in the quiet circle of prayer.

Method has a broader aspect than many people realize it possesses. Quite properly, a study of method includes ways of teaching effectively specific facts and specific skills. But, in its wider interpretation, method is concerned with the whole relationship between the teacher, the child, and the learning situation. For, as Dr. Kilpatrick reminds us, learning is never a single affair. It is manifold, and some of its aspects are only indirectly in control of the teacher. The four-year-old whose mother thoughtfully tells him that she believes God is the Spirit of love in his own heart, not only learns to think of God in these terms, but also learns confidence in his mother as someone who tries to help him think through his problems. The youngster who enters the kindergarten class in Sunday School and learns to repeat the words "God is love" learns at the same time that the other children are friendly or quarrelsome, that his teacher is loveable or the reverse. On the basis of these learnings, so extraneous to what the teacher may have intended, the child decides that Sunday School is a delightful activity or a boring one; or a mad scramble, or a place that frightens him. The child who is taken to church for the first time learns (perhaps!) to be quiet and considerate of others. He also learns to like to go to church, or wish to avoid going, to associate with church beauty and

dignity and joy, or restraint, discomfort, and boredom. It is relatively easy to get an estimate of whether or not the child takes the idea that God is a spirit, as an intellectual proposition. It is less easy to decide what feeling accompanies his acceptance of what he has been told. Whether or not the child can repeat the words "God is love," is transparently simple to test. How he feels about these words, what he thinks of his teacher, how well he enjoys the other children, will appear by degrees, but these attitudes cannot be "assigned for learning," neither can they be tested with real objectivity.

A domineering adult can keep a child quiet through a church service. How much of joy or of hate the child develops in the meantime is a product less easily measured. No learning ever goes on in isolation: ideals and attitudes, as well as the more easily defined habits and skills, are taught simultaneously. The latter, within limits, can be assigned; the former cannot,—they are by-products. And in all education many of these by-products are of more far-reaching importance than the habits and the skills which can be assigned and tested.

This does not mean that useful habits and skills are not important, for quite as much as ideals and attitudes, they go to make up character. They are required, for the child's growth, since they make it possible for him to adjust himself to the various requirements with which he is confronted. They

are the tools with which he must accomplish his life-work, the means through which he may express whatever he may have of creative ability. He must have the basic tools of reading, writing, and arithmetic, if he is to get on at all in the community of which he is a part. And get on in a community he must, since it is his nature to grow through human contacts. If he is to contribute richly to society, he must have far more tools than these. So toward living fully a religious life he may benefit greatly by learning habits of worship, by memorizing a certain amount of the poetry that forms so rich a part of our religious heritage, by studying the lives of those who had a genius for living the Good Life, by forming the habit of giving both personal service and worldly goods. But all these definite learnings, which we can so glibly set him as tasks profit him nothing, if he does not learn to love the Good Life, if he does not care to practice the carefully inculcated habits of worship, of memorizing, of religious reading, once our guiding or compelling hands are withdrawn. In religious, even more evidently than in general education of today, are attitudes and appreciations supremely important.

If we as grown people compare the activities which we carry on more or less under compulsion with those we ourselves have chosen, we must admit that our own purposes lead us to do willingly many hard and unpleasant things—things we should com-

plain of loudly, were we compelled by someone else to do them. The same thing is true of the child: he works willingly and joyfully toward the realization of ends which he himself has set up. He works less willingly and joyfully toward accomplishing assigned tasks. In fact, when we assign tasks we always have to accompany them with some motive—a hope of reward, or a fear of penalty, more or less subtly implied. In the present state of affairs, surrounded as we are by arbitrary requirements, many school and home tasks have to be assigned which individual teachers and parents would far rather not insist upon. Sometimes, too, an activity started under compulsion becomes a real interest, because the child finds he can do it successfully and comes to enjoy the activity for its own sake. But only "sometimes" in most activities: seldom or never in the case of forced "religious" activities. Arbitrary demands in this field of education constitute a contradiction in terms, since religion above all things implies joyful participation in the will and work of God, regardless of the name or sign according to which He is recognized.

In the foregoing paragraphs there is implied a theory of discipline which should perhaps be made more explicit. Many people, in both religious and general education, attack the "project method" because they think it does not supply the discipline which life demands of all of us. If the method be conceived of as merely a way of "getting the chil-

dren interested" in some activity, regardless of its value, this attack upon project teaching so-called is justified. Rightly understood, such a method provides for the only discipline that counts—self-discipline. Any purpose worth pursuing costs child or adult effort a-plenty. And those who understand the implications of the purposeful act for education, reserve to the adult, teacher or parent, the function of guidance — the right of choosing between those child purposes which are rich in value, and those which are passing whims. The project method, well directed, should result in the increasing ability of the child to subordinate mere whim to true purpose.

So far we have emphasized method in its broader aspect; in its narrower implications, it is also important for religious education. In the last few years there has been an appreciable growth in the efficiency with which the "tool subjects"—reading, writing, and number—are taught. From educational psychology we have learned much about the optimum length and distribution of drill, for instance in memorizing poetry. A better understanding of these principles of teaching on the part of people interested in religious education would facilitate the child's learning of the hymns and memory verses in home or Sunday School. But here, too, purpose is the crux of the matter—for it is not drill alone, but drill with attention which "makes

perfect." The best asset for good drill is the "involuntary attention" which a genuine interest catches and holds.

After considering the matter carefully and fearlessly, one can scarcely fail to see how difficult it is to find, within that content which we call "religious," really vital experiences for the preschool child. When one decides to use only such hymns, such stories, such formal prayers as truly help his own self-chosen activity to go forward, one's choice is greatly restricted even though wisely so.

From the discussion in this chapter, too, it is evident that there is no real distinction in aim between the new education, seriously undertaken, and so-called religious training. Whitehead has well written that "all education is essentially religious." The difference is rather one of emphasis. Fullness of character growth is the end of education, according to the philosophy of Professor Dewey and Professor Kilpatrick, a fullness which has no arbitrary limit. Both the ideal secular school and the school of religion agree that

> For Mercy, Justice, Courage, Mirth
> There is no measure upon earth.
> Nay, they wither, root and stem,
> If an end be set to them.

The inestimable worth of the human personality is recognized alike by pure Christianity and the

philosophy of John Dewey. But whereas the latter is essentially pragmatic and empirical, the former takes account of "realities of a different order from that with which the senses deal."

CHAPTER V

SONG AND STORY

Mothers of all lands sing to their babies, and there was never a time in history when the older generation did not pass on its folk-tales to the younger. For songs and stories are natural ways of appealing to children, and the most spontaneous methods by which the mature mind may establish rapport with the immature.

Singing is for the little child above all things an expression of joy; as such should it be cultivated, and as such is it of great worth in developing the spirit of joyful praise which we so much want to associate with his religious education. The best music for little children's singing is found among the folk-songs of the nations—English, German, Finnish, Norwegian—their simple melodies are many of them both beautiful and suitable. Complicated tunes, with difficult intervals, are inappropriate for the child, whose range of really sweet tones is exceedingly small. If we go beyond this range, the child cannot sing, he can only make a noise. It is impossible for him to memorize even approximately a melody which hops about the scale as do some of our well-beloved church songs. The

more suitable is the music of a song, the more readily may the child use it as a means of expression, and it is well worth the trouble to find for him hymns of praise which are not only good from the standpoint of the sentiment conveyed by their words, but also well within the limits of his musical technique and comprehension. Sweetness of tone is a great help in creating the atmosphere of beauty and reverence with which we hope to associate the child's experience of religion.

In considering the words of children's hymns, three standards might well guide our choice: the poetic value of the texts, the wholesomeness of their religious sentiment, and their simplicity. No one would wish to deride the well-beloved hymns, which have truly endeared themselves to generations of children. But it may be helpful to the reader to consider "I think when I read that sweet story of old," "Jesus loves me, This I know," and some of the others in the light of the standards here suggested. Precious to many have they indeed been, but equally precious to children of today may become:

> God our Father made the daylight
> God our Father made the night
> God made mountain, sea and sky
> And the white clouds floating by.[1]

Or, in the same song collection,

[1] Surette and Davison, One Hundred and Forty Folk Songs. George Schirmer, New York.

Who made ocean, earth and sky?
God, our loving Father
Who made sun and moon on high?
God, our loving Father
He made all the birds that fly
God our loving Father.

The most effective and delightful stories for children are those which are told for no reason other than sheer enjoyment. Yet stories have generally served other purposes, too. In olden times they preserved the tradition of the race, and wise men have always used them as a means of ethical teaching:

"For truth in loftier form may fail
But truth embodied in a tale
May enter in at lowly door."

The selection of stories has been ably discussed in more than one book on Children's Literature; therefore in this chapter the general principles used in making intelligent choices will be reviewed only very briefly.

In the first place, children's stories should be chosen for their beauty and their literary value. What world literature is to the adult, stories are to the little child, and we should be quite as intelligently critical of literary material for the nursery age as we are of reading matter for older boys and girls. Then, quite naturally, we wish to choose stories so that the child will get from them that

enjoyment and appreciation which constitute their greatest value. We know that little children like short stories, with the simplest of plots and with much rhythm and repetition. "Dog won't bite pig, pig won't jump over the fence, and I shan't get home tonight," and similar refrains, are the source of great glee, both because their rhythm is fascinating and because the child can easily learn to repeat much of the story himself.

From the point of view both of literary excellence and enjoyment, the richest source of story material for the preschool child is folk-lore. Folk stories are as old as Ur of the Chaldees; they have passed through many nations, and the original plots have been clothed in various national forms and colors. But fine and simple they have remained, their age-long endurance testifying to their inestimable worth. In good compilations for children, and the better primers and readers, "The Little Red Hen," "The Sky is Falling," "The House that Jack Built," "The Three Billy Goats," and many other tales of ancient lineage find their places. These stories have all the essentials of good literary material for children: they are simple in plot, frequently repetitive, and at the same time their ethical significance is clear and uncomplicated. To weave a tale so that it will convey a truth and yet lose none of its beauty, takes the genius of a Christ, or of those more ancient story-tellers whose names are lost to us. Modern stories for children written

for the purpose of teaching a moral rarely accomplish their end without sacrificing literary excellence.

The telling of stories to children is in itself something of an art. The over-dramatic manner of the professional story-teller, entertaining though it may be for adults, is out of place in the rendering of nursery tales. The professional frequently seems "funny" to the small child—not because of the humor of the stories he tells, but because his gestures and facial expressions are too pronounced. On the other hand, a dull, lifeless voice and no sense of the dramatic are also far from desirable, and a *via media* can be achieved only through special effort and practice.

A prime essential for the successful telling of a story to a young audience is that one thoroughly enjoy both the tale and the telling of it oneself. No matter how convinced one may be of the value of a selection from the literary standpoint, or how often one has been assured that "children enjoy it," if the story means nothing to the teller, the likelihood of its conveying anything to anyone else is exceedingly small. Very important, too, is the language in which the story is told. It is probably wise for all but the most experienced "story-tellers" to memorize, if not the whole story, at least the beginning, the end, and occasional telling sentences or phrases. This procedure preserves the character and dignity of the tale, and leaves the teller free to throw him-

self into the effective rendering of it. Stories should be so selected that they are intelligible to children in the language in which they are written; it is never permissible to "talk down" to children, or to make a story which is above their heads "go" by extra dramatic emphasis.

Formerly, people had very great confidence in the power of good stories to influence character and conduct. The tale of the "Honest Woodman," for instance, was told partly in the hope that through it children would learn the merit of truthfulness. Or the fairy tale of the little girl who disobeyed her fairy godmother and so had to leave the godmother's lovely palace until she learned to be obedient, was supposed to teach the virtue of obedience. Altogether, the older psychology held out the hope of a far greater "transfer" of something learned in one situation, to a different situation, than we now admit to be possible; and it encouraged far greater optimism with regard to the power of abstract "ideals" to influence overt conduct.

The newer psychology teaches that what is learned in one context will transfer to another only in the degree that the two situations are alike. For instance, no number of neat arithmetic papers will help the child keep neat bureau drawers; they won't even produce neat history papers unless the history teacher is just as insistent as the arithmetic teacher, and makes use of the actual skill in ruling

and arrangement learned in the arithmetic class. As for neat bureau drawers, neat personal appearance, and tidy work generally, these are only to be hoped for as a result of a "generalized attitude" of neatness. Particular experiences in connection with school papers, and house-keeping, and dressing, will help to produce a "neat person" only to the extent that they assist in building such an attitude.

If this be the case, how then can we hope that a virtue or a truth "embodied in a tale" will influence a child's character, will lead him to practice the virtue or prove the truth in his own experience? The answer is a sobering one for many of us who love to tell stories and have naive faith in their value. A story can only influence a child's life if he is so deeply impressed by it that he will proceed to act upon the insight he has received. "An ideal," said William James, "is an idea plus a tendency to act." It is upon the strength of this tendency, and this only, that we can rely in pleading the value of stories for character education. As a result of stories well chosen from the standpoint of ethics, we may hope for a love of truth which will make the child practice truth-telling; an admiration for generosity which will stimulate him to generous acts; a devotion to honor which will make him behave honorably. A story cannot directly "teach" truthfulness, generosity and honor.

Probably never should we extract the "moral" of a tale and present it to the child in predigested

form. This procedure merely ruins the story, and defeats its own purpose by removing the ethical concept from the setting which might make it delightful and inspiring. Rather should we choose stories which in their original form are of a sort to interpret truth to the child. Needless to say, the younger the child, the simpler must be the tale, the more obvious the motives of its characters. But we should never mutilate a story to change its ethical implications. Rather, if it be a good salary, the telling of it should be postponed until the child is able to weigh and judge more subtle implications. Nor does it seem to be good practice to ruin a fine old tale for the sake of giving it a pleasant ending. The wolf ate Red Riding Hood's grandmother. That was that. If the woodsman comes and performs a major operation to rescue her, she may live happily ever after, but the story is killed.

The choice of stories for use in the religious training of children was, until very recently, limited to Biblical material. Indeed, many people seem still to have the most sublime faith in the efficacy of Bible stories as such for children of any age. Some people, on the other hand, have ruled Biblical material out altogether, in a violent reaction against the absurdity of such selections as "Esau and Jacob," "Cain and Abel," and countless other examples.

Actually it would seem that neither extreme is justified. Bible stories in general are neither inher-

ently beneficial nor of themselves unsuitable for small children. They should be selected, like all other stories, for their beauty, their ethical value, and their suitability as means of interpreting life to the child. It would seem, too, that they should be selected in as large a proportion as their other values justify for use in specifically religious education, since they represent a priceless literary heritage, as well as a religious one; and since they are often conspicuously neglected in lists and collections of stories for young children.

The choice of literature for use in the religious education of children is principally determined by the attitudes one hopes to establish, the emphases one wishes to place, and, on the negative side, the impressions and implications one would rather avoid. There are excellent graded lesson series, to which the reader may turn for organized material, but in the belief that it may be helpful to people for whom organized series hold no special appeal, there follows here a brief account of some stories selected for a very small and informal group of children, ranging in age from four and one-half to seven.

In order that the reader may consider and criticize these selections intelligently, it is necessary to tell something about the group, and outline the principles according to which the choices were made. There were seven children in this group, all but one of whom were very well known to the

story-teller. The meetings were entirely voluntary—no one was urged to come. The class was actually started because the children wanted to go to "Sunday School" while their parents were not enthusiastic about sending them to a regular one. John and Thomas, referred to more than once in our discussions, were members of the class, and all the children had, for their age, a rich background of story experience. The story was the main activity at each meeting, and is the one which concerns us here. The prayer and worship activities will be discussed in connection with another chapter.

In a series of most informal meetings of the children's mothers and the teacher of the group, two working principles were decided upon: the children were to be entirely free and spontaneous, the leader never prolonging the discussion after they had passed the high-point of interest; and there was to be no attempt, during these brief meetings, to include any hand-work projects.

A few basic concepts, which seemed especially to be desired as outcomes of the story, song, and prayer experiences, were tentatively described as follows: (1) The concept of God as an Indwelling Spirit; (2) the appreciation of Christ as the most complete revelation of God's Spirit upon earth, and a love for the personality of the great Friend of all mankind; (3) the understanding that while there are many religions and varying forms of worship,

all are striving to realize the same God. This last aim, of course, was entirely implicit in what the teacher said and did, and whatever start was made toward its achievement was accomplished through trying to avoid any notion that Christianity is the sum of all truth, rather than through any positive teaching. Both the teacher and the mothers realized that only the humblest beginning could be made with such very young children. The teacher looked upon her work as being in no small measure "preventive" of prejudices and narrowness and superstition. The need for using the Fatherhood concept with children this age was frankly recognized, but it was agreed that throughout the stories and prayers every effort should be made to keep this concept as broad and inclusive as possible without straining a point.

With these ends in view, the following stories were chosen. They were told as simply as seemed consistent with maintaining literary standards, but whenever possible, the Biblical language with all its beauty and its rhythm was adhered to:

1. *The Adoration of the Shepherds.* The children met for the first time shortly before Christmas. This had seemed an auspicious time to begin, since it was certain everyone had some background for the first story—the birth of Christ, as it is told in the second chapter of Luke's Gospel. The story was prefaced by an account of how people had waited a

very, very long time for the coming of a Man Who would really know how to live entirely according to the will of God—Who would show God to all men on the earth. Everyone had thought that He would be born in a splendid palace, that he would be a powerful King, and that all the world would hear of his coming. Instead of this, a few poor shepherds, watching their flocks on the hillside, first heard that the little Christ child was born.

Thereupon followed the Bible story, with rather close adherence to the beautiful language of the Gospel, but with some added detail, apparently very interesting to the children, as to the way the town of Bethlehem probably looked, and the sort of shelter in which the shepherds found the baby.

2. At the next meeting of the group, the beginning of the story time was taken up in discussing the gifts brought to the Baby Jesus by the shepherds, and the gifts the children would have liked to bring him had they themselves been there. Following this discussion, there was told the story of "The Little Gray Lamb,"—the lamb who was left near the manger by a shepherd who had nothing else to give, and whose ugly gray coat seemed to have turned white and beautiful in the presence of the happy mother, Mary, and her baby.

3. *The Three Kings.* The story of the Magi came at the third meeting. The story-teller made a point of reading for her own preparation "The Meeting

of the Wise Men," so beautifully described in "Ben Hur." The story opened with a description of where and how the Wise Men lived, and how they watched long for the coming of a new star. As in the tale of the angels and the shepherds, the beautiful phrasing of the Testament was used as far as possible. The episode of the meeting with King Herod was omitted as non-essential to the spirit of the story and unsuitable for the children. Again gifts and giving were talked over, and the children's suggestions were given spontaneously and reverently.

4. *The Finding in the Temple.* The story of Christ among the doctors in the Temple was told at the fourth meeting. Realizing that the children might easily misinterpret this incident, as showing selfishness or heedlessness on the part of the child Jesus, the teacher tried to emphasize how He loved the poetry and stories in the books of the doctors, and how carried away He was with enthusiasm for the work of God. Following the account given in the Gospel, His ready departure with His parents for their home in Nazareth and His loving subjection to them as He grew in wisdom and stature, became the climax of the story.

5. *The Christ of Nazareth.* Following upon the Finding in the Temple, the story-teller presented an imaginative picture of the Hidden Years, including, as one of the lovely tales people told about Jesus, the legend of the clay birds modeled by the

Christ Child, which were so beautifully made that they seemed to be alive.

6. *Samuel.* The next story told was of another boy who, long years before Jesus was born, listened for the voice of God and did His bidding. Young Samuel, resting quietly in his bed "ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord" heard the divine call and answered it. (I Samuel 3, v. 1-10.)

7. *A story of David.* David, strong, and radiant and kindly of heart, called to be ruler over Israel, seemed to be a character the children could appreciate. The story began by telling how Samuel, still listening to the voice of God which he had first recognized as a little boy, was searching for a new king who could rule his people wisely, according to God's plan. After searching all over the land, it seemed to Samuel that David, youngest of the seven sons of Jesse, was the right choice. The story was continued to tell of how beautifully David played upon his harp, telling through its quiet tones the love of God which was in his heart, and how he played to Saul, quieting the sick king's anger and distress.

8. *"The Lord is my Shepherd."* The story opened with a simple description of shepherd life in Israel, its hardships and its dangers. It went on to tell how when David and his young companions were out upon the hilltops, or climbing down into the rocky valleys after their flocks in the dim star-

light, they made beautiful singing prayers called psalms, of which one of the loveliest begins "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." It was suggested that the oldest child in the group begin to learn this, and the psalm was used as a closing prayer that morning.

9. *"Feed My Sheep."* The next story was taken from the New Testament (John XXI, v. 15-17). It was told to explain that Christ wanted above all else to have His friends devoted and generous in their service of other people—even as good shepherds generously and unselfishly take care of their flocks. Christ asked one of His closest friends if he loved Him. When the friend answered, "Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," Jesus returned, "Feed my sheep."

10. *The Good Shepherd.* The parable of the Good Shepherd was told with no comment except that it was a story Jesus told. Judging by their quiet attention, it seemed to be much enjoyed by the children.

11. *St. Francis of Assisi.* Francis of Assisi, who loved so dearly all living things and was so poignantly conscious of the Presence of God, was described to the children as someone who, many, many years after Jesus, lived a Christ-like life. The story of his sermon to the birds was followed by a repetition of his prayer of praise. The children liked this prayer very much, and learned parts of it during the following weeks.

The original was abridged for their use; the lines read to them were the following:

"Praised be thou, my, Lord, with all thy creatures, especially milord Brother Sun that dawns and lightens us;

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars that thou hast made bright and precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Wind, and for the air and cloud and the clear sky and for all weathers through which thou givest sustenance to thy creatures.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Water, that is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Be praised, my Lord, for Brother Fire, through whom thou dost illumine the night, and comely is he and glad and bold and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, for Sister, Our Mother Earth, that doth cherish and keep us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and the grass.

Praise and bless my Lord and render thanks, and serve Him with great humility.[1]

12. "*Why We have Easter.*" The approach to this much needed story was made through the description of the first Palm Sunday—how people, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem, tore the branches from the trees and waved them, singing "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Because after nearly two thousand years people still love Jesus and sing to Him, we have Easter to thank God He once lived on the earth, and still lives in our hearts.

[1] See Taylor, Henry Osborn. *The Mediaeval Mind.* Vol. I, pp. 455-56.

There are only a few indirect ways of deciding how much a story means to a small child. One is the attention he appears to give, and this may be very misleading. A six-year-old boy once sat very still, apparently spellbound by the story his teacher was telling. His mother had been visiting his class that day, and was struck by his rapt attention. As they walked home together she remarked, "That was a nice story, wasn't it?" To which he replied, somewhat irrelevantly, "Gee! Wasn't her mouth funny!" We never know just what element in the story situation is fixing the attention. The group to whom the foregoing stories were told *seemed*, with a few exceptions, to be very much interested. But it is particularly easy to overestimate here!

Another way of gauging whether a story appeals to children is by whether or not they care to have it repeated, or attempt to repeat it themselves. No spontaneous offer was made to re-tell any of the stories, but several times they were quite well re-told by the children at the suggestion of the teacher and with her help. And, judging by comments made at home through the week, there were one or two points which made a distinct impression: especially, for example, the fact that people had made such a mistake in expecting the Christ Child to be a great king.

No special brief can be put forward for the stories told in the series which has been outlined. All that can be said is that a group of children lis-

tened to them gladly and willingly, and that, just as stories, they are lovely. Since everyone who has either told or read stories to children knows how they love the more familiar tales, it is perhaps reasonable to hope that in listening to those which have been mentioned here these particular children took the first step toward an abiding appreciation of their beauty, and the beauty of the characters they represent.

This, too, may perhaps be added. Any success in the choice and the use of such stories is conditioned by the intimacy of one's acquaintance with the children themselves. It is also greatly affected by one's own knowledge and love of the tales, and one's willingness to study them thoroughly. In telling such stories, even to so young an audience, it is well to read about them, to study the conditions under which they were written, and the times about which they tell, so that one may supply with confidence the details which children love.

Song and story may indeed be used to convey facts and information to the nursery child. But the first has its greatest use as a means for the child's own expression, and the second as a means of developing an appreciation for that which is both beautiful as literature and ethically true.

CHAPTER VI

PRAYER AND WORSHIP

Oh! *Thank you, God, for a lovely day.*
And what was the other I had to say?
I said "Bless Daddy," so what can it be?
Oh! Now I remember it. *God bless me.*

J. J. Milne's charming poem "Vespers" gives an entrancing picture of perfunctory babyhood religion at its best. "Christopher Robin is saying his prayers." Christopher is a happy soul, and as the crowning act of his well-ordered nursery day, he kneels at the foot of his crib and prays a happy, well-bred prayer to a God far away. According to Christopher's philosophy, one says correct and pleasant things to God, because, in some vague way, he is associated with the continuance of one's comfort and well-being. "God bless Mummy,—God bless Daddy,—God bless Nanny and make her good—thank you, God, for a lovely day—" (and a barely remembered "God bless me")—belong to the amenities of Christopher's life. It is a trifle hard to remember the whole nursery litany, since comfortable reflections on one's immediate surroundings *will* come creeping in—one's nice warm bath,

sister's bright blue dressing gown, are so much nearer than God! But conscientious small boys prod their memories.

Assuredly, it will do no harm to thank a pleasant God, with Christopher Robin, for the good things of life, as regularly as one goes through the rest of one's daily habits; indeed, it may do a fair measure of good. A regular time and place for one's devotions are admittedly helpful in cultivating an attitude of prayer, and to associate God with the precious and delightful experiences of life, no matter how vaguely, is a positive asset in the development of a wholesome religious outlook. But in Christopher's case, as the poem describes him, this association is very dim; his outward behavior is most correct, his reflections are wholesome and pleasant, yet his prayer is an empty form. Whether this mere formality will ever develop into a vital experience is an open question. We should have to know much more about Christopher's environment and education to hazard an answer.

Prayer as just a matter of form is at best of slight value in the child's development. To some grown people, indeed, such childish prayers remain a happy memory, to which they look wistfully in the stressful moments of their mature years, wishing that there were "something in it," to which one might turn back and yet maintain one's intellectual self-respect. But in the need for "turning back" comes the rub. No wholesome adult personality could

or should tolerate a "regression" to childish behavior. Childhood prayers, to count as a step toward the prayers of maturity, must carry within them seeds of growth which permit them to expand into the worship and petition of the "grown person." "God bless Mummy and Daddy, and me," prayed on the basis of "what was the other I *had* to say?" soon degenerates into mere patter, the butt of a half-wistful ridicule in later years. A reverent "Thank God" at thirty-five implies a very different content of meaning from the "Thank you, God," uttered at five; but the spirit actuating both should be identical.

The teaching of prayer as a form is a very simple matter. The development of the prayerful attitude is delicate and difficult in the extreme, and is achieved, if at all, only as a "concomitant" of wise and careful guidance. Truly enough, the guidance which we adults may give depends upon our own insight, and the maintenance of our intellectual integrity limits many of us in the meanings we can help children attach to prayer. However, once assuming that the attitude of prayer is one which we wish the child to develop, there are certain general considerations on the subject which may be helpful to all, regardless of shades of belief or agnosticism.

First of all, if we take the guidance of children seriously, and have likewise a respect for what prayer has meant and still means in the lives of

many men, we will not teach children to "say their prayers" as a sort of trick. The first condition of prayer is reverence, and the atmosphere surrounding it is one of dignity and reserve. The fond mother who invites her visitors in to "hear the children say their prayers" is, from this point of view, justified only if she believes the visitors can add something to the prayerful attitude in the nursery. No matter how "cute" or "adorable" the performance may be, it is not *per se* a matter for exhibition, and in these days of "child psychology" no one needs to be reminded that a two-year-old knows when he is being exhibited. An attitude of prayer which grows with the years is collected, quiet, serious. One cannot begin with an exhibit and hope for intimate experience as a result.

Then, extremely simple though the prayers of little children must needs be, the content of these prayers must increase, gradually indeed, but constantly, else there comes the mere patter of an empty form. The adults about them are largely responsible for this content, and we are greatly concerned to have it a wholesome one. It has been well said to adults "Prayer is . . . not beseeching God to give us what we want but to make us worthy and willing to receive what is already our own, and to do and be what He wants us to do and be." No matter what one's interpretation of "the psychology of prayer" may be, the only belief in its efficacy which can survive self-conscious intellec-

tual development and the criticisms of modern psychology is that which looks upon it as a collection of inner resources, a calling up of strength to will and to do. This is, unfortunately, a hard saying for many supposedly "grown" people: how then may one apply it to the nursery child?

Of course, no definite series of "steps" in the process can be outlined. But it is not difficult to see that the best approach to wholesome and unselfish prayer is the spontaneous gratitude for "the great, wide, wonderful world," as well as for the security and affection of home which is so readily enkindled in children. It takes little suggestion to call forth a prayer such as John once offered in perfect simplicity, "Thank you, God, for my dear, dear, mother"; or even a rhythmic outburst such as the following, contributed by John's small brother, "Thank you, God, for the balls and the bikes, and wagons, and carts, and all the little shoe-button eyes."

In the little "Sunday School" group described in the last chapter, there was always a "Thank You" prayer—developed in this way: The teacher asked each child for some one thing for which he wanted to thank God; she then wove these into a prayer, adding some petitions of her own. There was not a great variety of suggestion—not always did every child make a contribution. But all the children listened reverently while their combined prayers were

offered, and the prayer itself was accompanied by a little "sotto voce" hum, on which the teacher never commented, but which represented the children's attempt to repeat her words very softly after her.

In the nature of the case, it is more difficult to build wholesome and acceptable attitudes in connection with prayers of petition than in connection with prayers of gratitude and praise. The really mature prayer of a truly "grown" person represents inclusive petitions—not personal requests. We are reminded that it is "*Our* father" not "*My* father" which opens the prayer of Christ. What we hope is that the child will learn to pray for strength to do and to serve. What we avoid with difficulty are petitions made because the child thinks God may be cajoled into altering the course of natural events for the sake of individual whim or pleasure. "Please, God, don't let it rain tomorrow because we want to go on a picnic," may indeed be prayed from the heart. If it is overheard, it should surely not be corrected by "the country needs the rain," but it is nevertheless an indication that the child is getting something of the Great Magician concept of God, and is missing, as so many of us miss it, the abiding significance of prayer.

Instances could be multiplied of attitudes which adults encourage in children and which are altogether inimical to an intelligent, enduring habit of prayer. The child who is fearful readily grasps

at a crude notion of God as the Great Protector, Who guards, whimsically and arbitrarily, against physical dangers, rather than as the Power which gives confidence and calm decision, helping the child to help himself. Many small children are taught to pray to God to take care of them in the dark. Psychologically, this is a bad way to handle fear of darkness—religiously, it tends toward a narrow idea of God and encourages appeal on behalf of selfish, individual interest. Is the mature prayer for confidence and strength beyond the nursery child? Perhaps. But at least he need not be expressly taught to rely upon false security rather than inner strength.

Sensitive children also easily accept the notion of God as moral arbiter. Again, what one would really wish is very difficult to achieve, and its crude opposite, the "I-see-you-and-I'm-after-you" concept of God very easy to establish. Can the nursery child appreciate the prayer of the poet:

> "Oh little self, oh God, oh morning star,
> Give us thyself, forgive us what we are."

Hardly. But he may begin to associate God with an inner sense of right, an inner power of self-control. Said John, "Thank you, God, for helping me not to cry at school today." And Thomas, "I knew it was wrong. God told me not to do it."

The guidance of children in the matter of prayer

is infinitely difficult because the issues are so intimate and personal. What we do seems crude and awkward in the extreme—in general, most of us slide along the scale from sentimentality to an intellectualism which is meaningless to the small child, from "talking down" in a silly, insincere fashion, to getting "way above the child's head." Probably the only safe approach is to cultivate the feelings of reverence, gratitude, petition, and to allow the form to come as far as possible from the child. The fundamental principle of all worthy education is to respect above all the child's personality: it is a principle easily violated in religious training. What right has even a mother to pry into the "rights" and "wrongs" of a child's day, and arbitrarily associate these with his evening prayer? The present writer wonders. Perhaps, after all, it is better never to establish the good, regular habits possessed by Christopher Robin—but rather to leave prayer for the mood of the moment, even while trying consistently to cultivate that mood at certain definite times.

Illustrations of prayers both wholesome and unwholesome may easily be drawn from the repertoire of the conventionally well-trained child. Consider the time-honored bedtime prayer,

> Now I lay me down to sleep.
> I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
> If I should die before I wake
> I pray the Lord my soul to take.

If these words are understood, they do not make for restful slumber. If they are not understood, they are readily twisted into the endless parodies we all have known.

Consider, too, the lines of the familiar hymn, often used as an evening prayer,

> Through the darkness be Thou near me
> Keep me safe till morning light.

Such a sentiment is hardly effective in teaching the child confidence in the dark, and scarcely productive of an adequate conception of the interests of God.

On the other hand, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," is exquisite in its poetry, beautiful in its imagery, and its content has a quality such that it may grow indefinitely in depth of meaning. Perhaps one may object that the Twenty-Third Psalm is beyond the comprehension of the nursery child. In its spirit, is it really any more so than "Now I lay me down to sleep?" Comparatively, what is the fate of each of these as the child grows older and more critical? Should not the teaching of a traditional prayer be postponed until the truly lovely one can be understood?

It is by no means intended to suggest that the formal, in the sense of the historic and traditional, prayer has no place in the repertoire of small children. Really, formal prayers frequently bring to the child new language, new forms of expres-

sion. An "informal" "God bless so-and-so, and so-and-so," may have all the detriments of formal prayer and none of its virtues. The prayer of the Master, representing the perfection of expressed praise and petition, is quite enough within the range of four- or five-year-old comprehension to justify its careful teaching when the child is in the mood to appreciate it. It is not necessary to understand every word of a prayer before learning it, any more than it is necessary to have children understand every word of a poem before committing it to memory. Familiarity with prayer or poem, provided its spirit be understood and shared, brings added appreciation as the years go by—even though without such sharing of its spirit it truly "breeds contempt." There is no single petition in the Lord's Prayer the feeling of which the four-year-old may not begin to share; there are no hampering limits within it which would preclude its growth in meaning throughout three-score-years and ten. We cannot say this of many of our pitiful attempts to write "baby prayers."

"Formal" or informal, prayers may be real or they may be patter. The sentiment they convey may be appropriate and wholesome—or the reverse, depending both upon their expression and upon their spirit although infinitely more upon the latter. Through prayer the child may learn new confidence in the boundless strength which is within him and about him, or he may cultivate

superstition, fearfulness, lazy reliance upon the "Goodness of God."

No one will deny the essentially intimate and individual character of prayer, yet many will testify to the value of group prayer, of joining in the worship of others. Ordinarily, the child learns his prayers from his mother, and prays with her, so his first experience of prayer is in a limited way social in its setting. But it is impossible for the mother to avoid more or less dominating the child's prayer, coloring it with her own belief and personality. Even when the mother and child prayer becomes a family prayer, it is easy to quite overwhelm the individual child's own thought and expression. While family prayer may give much of inestimable value in the establishment of wholesome religious attitudes, it probably does not help him toward independence and originality of expression as effectively as may the experience of praying with a group of children his own age.

Even in the case of the very little child, praying in a group may be made really helpful. Simple and brief though it was, the group prayer mentioned earlier in this chapter was apparently a very vital part of the Sunday morning experience. A worship service, well planned, is an extremely important activity in any Sunday School program. But if such a service is to be of value in the cultivation of wholesome prayer attitudes, it must be reverent, dignified, beautiful; as reverent as the most inti-

mate prayer in the child's own nursery,—as dignified, on the small child's level, as the service in church is on an adult level. Such a service requires taste, tact, and understanding of little children in the planning. If it is to mean anything to the child, he must partake in it heartily. He must be able to join in the hymns, and to repeat some of the prayers. One becomes almost hopeless in trying to avoid two extremes: a beautifully planned affair which is to the children at best a "show," and an exceedingly inaesthetic, nearly irreverent celebration, in which each child sings his loudest and his lustiest. One rarely achieves the perfect mean, but the following suggestive comments might be offered. For little children, a service must be very, very short. The prayers and hymns must be simple and child-like—not, in the accepted sense of the word, "childish." They should be chosen for their beauty and for their suitability to the small child's intellectual and musical capabilities. The purpose of such an activity is to give the small child the same sort of help which adults get from a beautiful church service. As beautiful architecture, good music, flowers, lend charm and dignity to the service for grown people, so do they to the service for the little child. But the child will listen gladly to the music for only a few brief minutes, he will be content to enjoy the beauty of the church or chapel for only a short time. Therefore, to many of us it does not seem worth while—we content

ourselves with the limited aesthetic possibilities of the Sunday School room. Often, fair results seem to be achieved, but not the best. Experience with individual children and with a larger group has at least quite convinced the writer that it is worth the pains to take the four- to six-year-old into the church for a brief ten minutes of worship; that even such small children take a delight in it which one cannot associate with the prayers and hymns in the Sunday School room. It is hard to define what they get, beyond saying that they "take delight," but after all a true account of poetic, or literary, or musical appreciation can never be given in words.

The prayer and worship of the nursery child is the wellspring of the religious life of maturer years. There is no thought concerning prayer, its meaning and its value, which does not apply alike to the four-year-old and the adult. Theoretically at least we know that the prayer of maturity is properly a calling upon inner resources, a quiet recollection of all the power at our command. In the words of the catechism, "Prayer is the uplifting of the heart to God," characterize Him what we will; it is never truly the frightened ejaculation or the selfish request for personal benefit. Neither is it an empty form, beautiful though this form may be. After all, we can do but little in directly teaching the child to pray, but that little must be done with all the characteristics of mature prayer in

mind: we have no right to hamper him with crude conceptions of prayer's efficacy, nor to bind him to empty forms. Reverence, beauty, dignity, and above all freedom are the conditions of the prayerful attitude: it is ours to assure these conditions that the child may grow in reverent understanding, and that he may not lose his spontaneous, grateful tendency to worship in spirit and in truth.

CHAPTER VII

IN TIMES PAST

A history of the religious training of little children from the time of the Early Fathers of the Church to the present,—from the days when it was the only thing that really mattered—to this generation when many people wonder where there need be any such training at all—would be very interesting and revealing. It would show how people thought and felt not only about religion as such, but about the child as an individual—his rights and his duties in his relations to his parents, to the community, and to the Eternal God. Such a history would also show changing conceptions of parental duties and responsibilities. It is a far cry from the days when it was thought that parents must train their children to unquestioning acceptance of traditional religious and moral standards, to the time when many began to think that young folk should learn to choose wisely for themselves—in manners, in morals, and in religion as well.

Needless to say, the whole story of the religious education of young children would require a long, scholarly work. But some of the notions of earlier

days were so powerful in their influence throughout many centuries, and still account for so many current attitudes and problems, that it does not seem out of place to recall them in connection with a practical discussion of child life and religion.

Christianity indeed won for the child the privilege of life, a privilege which even the Greek philosophers would have denied him under certain conditions. Regardless of his physical status at birth, and regardless of whether or not he were wanted by his parents, the Fathers of the Church established his inalienable right to survival. Yet, paradoxically, little concern was given his physical well-being and his temporal happiness: but rather did he live to undergo regeneration through baptism and to achieve spiritual salvation through instruction in the truths and ritual of the church. From the moment of conception the child was believed to have a soul which must either be saved during his earthly lifetime or be forever lost.

The duty which the early Church laid upon fathers and mothers was strict and rigid in the extreme,—their failure to have their offspring duly baptized and instructed was held to entail their own damnation. "Whosoever they be that desert their children, and do not instruct them in the fear of the Lord, let them be anathema," we read in the Apostolical Constitutions. And again, "Ye fathers, educate your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord . . . bring them under with

cutting stripes and make them subject from their infancy, teaching them the Holy Scriptures, which are Christian and divine." [1]

In the days of the early Fathers, parental duties carried with them very extreme parental rights. It was a virtuous and laudable act, for instance, to consecrate a little girl to virginity—such a consecration was supposed to carry with it not only spiritual blessing for the child, but also spiritual benefit for the parent. St. Jerome, writing to the noble lady Laeta,[2] commends her dedication of her small daughter to a life of virginity, and goes on to assure the good mother that as a result he believes she will be rewarded by becoming the mother of sons.

One hopes, and indeed it is quite certain, that there were always humane and kindly people, with insight into the true spirit of "the Holy Scriptures which are Christian and divine," who did not associate these with the subjugation of the child nor accompany them by "cutting stripes." In fact, St. Jerome himself made some suggestions concerning the education of Laeta's little daughter which showed real sympathy with the nature of small children. But in the early Christian centuries the general trend and character of childhood training

[1] See *Apostolical Constitution* in *Ante Nicene Christian Fathers*. Edited by Roberts and Donaldson, Scribners, New York, 1896. Quoted in Forest, *Preschool Education*, p. 19.

[2] See *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Second Series. Edited by Schaaf and Wace. Scribners, New York, 1912.

in religion was hardly one which is in accord with our present interpretation of the meaning of Christianity or the modern motion of child nature and child rights. When salvation through repression of the natural instincts was the object of training, the terrifying of the child through threats of eternal hell-fire too often became the means. The concept of a God Who is Love could hardly coexist with the notion of the Awful Judge of the Dies Irae, and the pressure to extinguish the Old Adam in one's children must have frequently defeated natural impulses toward tender parental behavior.

Reverend Francis Aidan Gasquet, in an interesting monograph, "Christian Family Life in Pre-Reformation Days," [1] describes the relation between parents and children in the England of that time. Parents in the Pre-Reformation days seem to have been considered surrogates of God, for their children were required to kneel and ask their blessing every night, subjecting themselves to their parents completely. It was counseled by one writer of the period that any child who refused to observe this formality be "whisked with a good rod, and compelled thereto by force."

During the same era, children on the continent enjoyed in general no happier home relationships than did the English children. Martin Luther, writ-

[1] *Educational Briefs.* Philadelphia Diocesan School Board Publications, No. 17, 1907.

ing of his own childhood,[1] has much to say concerning the extreme severity of his father's discipline, for which, however, the son bore the elder no malice, realizing that it was done to save him from the dire results of indulging his own impulses. The most conscientious fathers of the day did their best to stand as human representatives of the Awful Judge Who was God. Even Luther's own writings on the education of children sound the same stern note of repression and discipline as that which distinguished his own upbringing. The "Kleiner Katechismus" conveys the same "threats of hell and hopes of paradise" as the catechisms of an earlier generation. Yet it should not be forgotten that from Luther we have the favorite Christmas Hymn for little children, with all its tenderness and *naïveté*.

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head
The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

And again,

Ah Lord, Who hast created all
How hast Thou made Thee weak and small?
That Thou must choose Thine infant bed
Where ox and ass have lately fed?

No one needs to be reminded that the Reformation brought no softening influence into the

[1] See Luther's "Tischreden" (*Sammtliche Schriften*, Bd. XXII, Magdeburg, 1740). Quoted in Forest, *Preschool Education*, p. 20.

religious education of small children, nor were parents patterned upon the model of any less Awful God than Him of earlier Christian centuries. The status of the child according to the Westminster Confession has before been mentioned, and in the biographical material of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there are abundant illustrations of the spirit in which the guidance of the child's religious life was undertaken by even the most intelligent and devoted of Protestant parents.

An interesting source of descriptive material about the education of the young child in an early New England home is the Diary of Judge Sewall [1] which is replete with illuminating notes on the religious training of his own family. Thirteen living babies were born to the good judge between the years 1678 and 1701, and were "offered up to God in Baptisme, at South Meeting House, in Boston." Six of these babes died in infancy. They had received "Baptisme," yet, even though they had lived in this wicked world only one short month, their eternal salvation or damnation lay in the Will of a stern God. So a minister came to pray with them as they lay dying in their nurse's arms.

The judge was a most kindly and affectionate father, very much interested in the education of his children. Yet his main purpose was to impress them with "God's awful and surprising Provi-

[1] Samuel Sewall's Diary. *American Bookshelf Series.* Edited by Mark van Doran. Macy-Masius, 1927.

dences." Young Samuel, at the age of seven, who from the fleeting glimpse one gets of him in the diary, appears to have been a healthy "unregenerate" youngster, is brought to "an awful cry" in commencing the Lord's prayer, following an exhortation from his father about the need of preparing for death. Upon being questioned, the boy explained that he was afraid lest he should die, whereupon the conscientious father read him "comforting passages," such as "Oh death, where is thy sting?"

Samuel's sister, Elizabeth, evidently a sensitive, high-strung child, was deeply, and today we should say unwholesomely, affected by her religious training. At eight years of age she burst into tears in reading the selection for the day, Isaiah 24. The opening verse of her reading was "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty, and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof," indeed a hard passage for an eight-year-old! While one appreciates her precocity in understanding it to the point of being distressed, one sees the danger lurking in her intense emotional reaction.

At fourteen, Elizabeth suffers many "painful pangs" on the subject of religion, election, salvation, and the like—her father gives several instances of what we should now call hysteria, but which he evidently looked upon as evidences of spiritual growth. On one occasion, her father prayed with

her "with many Tears on either part"—and "gave her solemnly to God in Prayer."

The Sewall diary abounds with references to children. Most of them are concerned with deaths, painful accidents, and religious training. Deaths and accidents which should probably have been laid to careless supervision and dangerous surroundings are consistently blamed upon "God's Surprising Providence," and the whole burden of child training in religion, according to Sewall, is "to serve the Lord in fear."

Some twenty years earlier in old England another interested and devoted father recorded in his diary some of the happenings which befell his children, particularly in the case of one named Richard, who died at the age of five years, three months. This pathetic baby is described by his father, John Evelyn, in illuminating fashion: "A prodigy for wit and understanding . . . of incredible and rare hopes. To give only a little taste of them, and thereby glory to God . . . he had learned all his catechism . . . astonishing were his applications of Scripture upon occasion, and his sense of God; he had learned all his catechism early, and understood the historical part of the Bible and New Testament to a wonder, how Christ came to redeem mankind . . . He would of himself select the most pathetic psalms, and chapters out of Job, to read to his maid during his sickness, telling her, when she pitied him, that all God's children must

suffer affliction. He declared against the vanities of the world, before he had seen any."

During the last hours of his life, "he demanded whether he might pray to God with hands unjoined," and what, writes the grief-stricken father, "may I say of his frequent pathetical ejaculations, uttered of himself, 'Sweet Jesus, save me, deliver me, pardon my sins, let thine angels receive me.' " [1]

One is glad to note that this babe was, even in his father's eyes, a prodigy, since the father writes: "Such a Child I never saw. For such a Child I bless God in whose bosom he is." In these days one thinks of little Richard Evelyn as an intellectually gifted child, pitifully handicapped by physical illness. By dint of his intelligence he was able to learn the whole catechism, by reason of his unwholesome, shut-in existence he dwelt morbidly upon its contents, and upon the further scriptural construction with which his devoted parents crammed his active mind. To his father, the learned seventeenth century gentleman and scholar, he seemed an infant saint, "too good for this world"; to us, his short life appears as a tragedy which might perchance have been avoided through intelligent concentration upon his physical needs rather than pious admiration for his morbid interest in sanctity and salvation.

Besides his reflections on his own children and

[1] *Evelyn, John. Diary and Correspondence.* Edited by William Bray. Revised Edition, George Bell, London, 1883, vol. I, pp. 341-44. (Bohn's Historical Library.)

the education of his time, John Evelyn has left a most interesting translation of an educational treatise written in a far earlier day. St. John Chrysostom's "Golden Book on the Education of Children," translated and included in Evelyn's "Literary Remains," was doubtless one of the sources of the sixteenth century gentleman's own ideas on the religious education of children. We can well imagine Evelyn following Chrysostom's suggestions in the training of poor little Richard.

In the "Golden Book," Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople during the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century A.D., goes into considerable detail both as to the content and the method of religious education. For the young children of those days he recommends the story of Cain and Abel as an especially good starting point, because of the clarity of the story, and its value in teaching the fear of the Lord. Concerning this fear, in the efficacy of which he apparently had great faith, Chrysostom writes: ". . . sowing this doctrine only in the child, thou wilt have no need of a pedagogue, since the fear which the Deity doth hereby work in him will affect the child beyond every other apprehension whatsoever, and will extremely move his mind."[1]

According to Chrysostom, some concession should be made to the child's youth—"Sweeten

[1] Chrysostom, *Golden Book on the Education of Children.* In "Literary Remains of John Evelyn Esq." Pub. by R. Bentley for Henry Colburn, London, 1834, p. 124.

your discourse with some pretty diversions, that the child may take delight in what you say, lest it become tedious." [1] "Much philosophy, far exceeding the comprehension of the child may (with a little condescension) be implanted into the spirit of the child so that it be skilfully and dexterously handled."

Childish play had little value alike in the eyes of the fourth century bishop and his sixteenth century translator: "Discourse freely to him—(the child)—withdrawing him as much as possible from childish sports, remember that thou bringest up a philosopher, and a champion, and a citizen of heaven." [2]

When one considers how deeply the idea of a future life of blessedness or damnation colored the thinking of the godly in those days, one is not surprised that the earliest community efforts for the education of the young children of the poor were mainly directed toward their religious training. The Charity School movement, one of the earliest attempts to educate children through community effort, was initiated in 1698 for the express purpose of "promoting Christian knowledge among the poor." The curricula of the "Ragged Schools," the "Sunday Schools," and the "Infant Schools" of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century England were almost entirely "religious" in character.

[1] Ibid., p. 126.
[2] Chrysostom, in *Evelyn*, op. cit., p. 120.

The poor little souls must be snatched as "Brands from the burning." They must be taught to fear hell and hope for redemption. Their parents must be goaded into taking thought for their salvation, and their own baby minds must be instructed in the truths of religion.

An interesting little exhortation entitled "Plain Advice to Parents" was published anonymously early in the nineteenth century and it is a nice illustration of the general attitude of religious folk with regard to the training of children. The writer of "Plain Advice" admonishes parents that they must sometimes unfold to their children "the terrors and glories of another world, speak to them of that dreadful hell which God hath prepared for the wicked." Another little treatise by the Reverend James Janeway, published in Boston in 1804, has the same general tenor. This gem is entitled "A Token for Children: A Book of Stories of Saintly Children Who Lived Saintly Lives and Died Saintly Deaths between the Ages of Three and Fourteen." In the preface the Reverend Mr. Janeway reminds parents that their children are "never too little to die, never too little to go to hell." He then goes on to address his child readers thus:

"You may now hear, my dear lambs, what other good children have done, and remember how they wept and prayed by themselves. But tell me, my dear children, and tell me truly, do you as these

7.820

children did? Did you ever consider your miserable state by nature? . . .

"Where do you think those children go when they die, that do not do what they were bid? . . . Why, I will tell you. . . They must go to their father, the devil, into everlasting burnings. . . Would you be in the same condition as those naughty children?" And so forth. The language is simple and child-like (!) throughout the reverend gentleman's discourse,—which really covers the essentials of Calvinism for the young, made "interesting" by their connection with tales of "the lives and deaths of saintly children." [1]

From time immemorial the device of using rhymes for didactic purposes has been a favorite concession to the interests of the infant mind. Quaint examples of this method of instruction may be found in "The Babees' Book—Mediæval Manners for the Young," translated from old manuscripts in the texts of Dr. Furnivall. One section of the Babees' Book, to wit "The Book of Courtesy," translated from a manuscript dated 1480, devotes about a hundred lines of verse to a discussion of what one might call the young person's religious manners, among which the following bit of instruction appears:

> Be courteous to God and kneel adown
> On *both* knees, with great devotion.

[1] Cf. Janeway, p. 9. Quoted in Forest, *Preschool Education*, p. 23.

To man thou shalt kneel upon the *one*
The other to thyself thou hold alone.[1]

The practice of teaching morals, and indeed doctrine, through verses which might fairly be called doggerel was common in the early nineteenth century English Infant Schools. The following cheerful verses were written for use in an Infant School:

"Who are the dead?—In heaven or hell
Their disembodied spirits dwell;
Their buried forms, in bonds of clay
Await the resurrection day.

Who were the dead?—the sons of time
In every age, and state, and clime.

* * * * * * * *

Who are the living? They whose breath
Draws every moment near to death,
Of bliss or woe the eternal heirs,
Oh what awful choice is theirs![2]

. . . . . .

One may find in the literature of the period many little lessons in morals for infants such as this one:

Hymn

Idle boys and girls are found
Standing on the tempter's ground
He will find them work to do
He will pay their wages, too.[3]

[1] Furnivall, *The Babees' Book*. Done into modern English by Edith Rickert. Chatto & Windus, London; Duffield & Co., New York, 1908, p. 86. Italics mine.

[2] Brown, J. R. *An Essay on the Cultivation of the Infant Mind*. London, 1832. Quoted in Forest, Preschool Education, pp. 97-98.

[3] Ibid.

As we have said before, a careful, detailed study of the religious training of young children throughout the Christian era could not fail to reveal in every land and century many instances in which such education was undertaken and carried out in the spirit of the Master. Yet it is true that in times past much of the instruction of little children in religion was colored by repression, fear, and a concept of a God of Vengeance rather than a God of Love. Indeed, this repression and fear, this attitude toward the nature of man and the nature of God, influenced the whole trend of people's behavior toward the young.

Child life was for long centuries thought to be of value chiefly because of "the immortal soul." Eternal salvation in a future life was held to be the real goal of human endeavor, therefore the child's physical welfare and his happiness on earth were secondary considerations. For these reasons it was believed that the child of the common man required little instruction beyond the catechism,—while all children needed to have their "sinful condition by nature" changed through baptism, religious practices and experiences, strict and repressive discipline.

Then came the great political and social changes of the nineteenth century—the birth of modern democracy, the development of the scientific method. Rousseau voiced the spirit of these great changes, and to Rousseau does modern education

owe its first inspiration. Rousseau, it will be recalled, flung as his challenge to the old religious conceptions the impassioned statement that "Everything is good as it comes from the hand of God," and exhorted elders to "Hold childhood in reverence." Other educational reformers following closely upon him carried on the torch. Among these the most important for this discussion is Friedrich Froebel, who not only developed a complete philosophy of early childhood education based upon the inherent goodness and nobility of human nature, but also elaborated a method of teaching and an institution which he named the kindergarten. In his own words, Froebel wished to "unshackle childhood," and to inaugurate loving guidance in place of repression and fear.

Now the theory of the Froebelian kindergarten was based upon a rather confused philosophy, born of German Idealism, and made very difficult of understanding to the "lay" mind by Froebel's personal leanings toward mysticism. But the theory was altogether optimistic, and the kindergarten itself quite the happiest environment in which the Historic Child had ever found himself. Kindergartens were imported from Germany to America in the eighteen-sixties, and spread with amazing rapidity. Kindergarten methods were put into the English Infant Schools, and presently the infant class of the traditional Sunday School of Religion was turned into a "kindergarten." Now there

could be nothing more diametrically opposed than the sort of teaching offered four-and-five-year-olds in an orthodox Sunday School and the Froebelian kindergarten. Froebel above all things wished to stress positive morality, and to keep all negative or terrifying influences out of the young child's life. But unfortunately too the Froebelian methods frequently degenerated into sentimentality. The combination of traditional religious teaching and mawkish sentimentality could not logically be a happy one. It probably accounts in part for the confused notions of God which MacLean found in his study of Protestant Sunday Schools. Of course it does not account for all the confusion: traditional religious teaching was undergoing some changes and modifications on its own in many places—higher criticism, "the new theology of the social gospel," and so forth, were inaugurating many reforms and changes with which, it is assumed, the reader is familiar. But some of the more objectionably idealized nature stories, some of the tendency to create the concept of "a God Whose reputation cannot be squared with His acts," may perhaps be laid at the door of "kindergarten method," which progressive pastors and Sunday School superintendents introduced, rightly thinking that kindergartens on the whole were good for children.

Of the parents who today revolt against the idea of organized religious education probably a large

number fall into two classes: those who reacted violently against the orthodox teachings of religious dogma, sacred to John Evelyn, Judge Sewall, and countless others of their day, but revolting to the modern mind; secondly, those who were once disgusted by the sentimental and would-be modern teaching of some Sunday Schools a generation ago.

Something of the situation among educated parents today was indicated in early chapters. Some yearn to teach "the old faith" to their children, even though it be outworn to themselves; others are trying to modify the said faith, so that it will be wholesome for both themselves and their young children in the present age, by building upon its social aspects and eliminating its "supernaturalism." Others again have confidence in the abiding reality of spiritual experience, regardless of the changes through which its outward forms have passed. Some of these last "within" the church and others technically "without" it, are trying to give children from the very start conceptions, attitudes, and habits of thought and prayer which shall be broad and adequate enough to withstand the changes in the midst of which we find ourselves—and the greater changes which may be yet to come.

Can there be progress in methods of religious teaching, regardless of the history of such teaching and its erstwhile opposition to child freedom and the discipline of life? Or are progress in education and religious training irreconcilable? On two counts

at least we may say yes to the former and no to the latter question. We are learning much about child nature from scientific sources—and while what we are learning need not diminish our enthusiasm for love and freedom in childhood education, we are quite redeemed by it from the sentimentality of the first Froebelians, and are able to distinguish flaws in original nature, even while we deny "total depravity." Then, with our increasing insight we may hope to distinguish with greater clarity than in the past between fact and symbol, between literal accuracy in the interpretation of religious doctrine and that which is true in spirit. It is significant that the Awful Surprising Providence of the seventeenth century has almost passed from our ken, while the perennial Christ Child still moves the hearts of modern children to wonder and delight.

CHAPTER VIII

FACT AND SYMBOL

A maiden great-aunt of New England ancestry, so the story is told, once went to call upon her young niece's first born son. "Don't you think the baby is *beautiful,* Aunt Priscilla?" inquired the fond young mother. Now the baby seemed to Aunt Priscilla quite the ugliest little creature she had ever beheld. But in her devotion for her great-niece she compromised with her standard of truthfulness and responded, "Yes, dear, he is beautiful!"

All the way home Aunt Priscella's conscience tormented her. She had told a lie! For several days she struggled, torn between her sense of sin and her concern for her niece's feelings. But the conscience won. So she sat down and wrote an affectionate letter, in which her astonished niece presently read: "I told you a dreadful lie. I said Billy was beautiful,—he *is* a nice healthy baby—but he is the homeliest little thing I have ever seen."

Aunt Priscilla can be credited with no greater passion for veracity than that which distinguishes some of us today in our consuming desire to have our children know "all the facts," particularly, one

is tempted to add, in certain fields within which we ourselves are none too sure of these facts.

The importance of complete honesty and integrity in our dealings with children was stressed in our first chapter, and it can hardly be exaggerated. However, such integrity is not necessarily maintained by a high degree of literal accuracy in telling children facts. Actually, one may think of cases in which many facts, the significance of which cannot possibly be grasped, may obscure the issue rather than enlighten the child.

Excellent illustrations may be taken from the field of sex education. We of today are in a very good position to see all the bad results of withholding from children information concerning sex development, marriage, and procreation, which they actually need in order to understand the world in which they live. We have thoroughly learned the lesson of what results from making sex questions tabu, and from discouraging the child who asks for sex information. It has been borne in upon us that we must be straightforward in handling sex questions, else the child will acquire distorted and unhealthy notions *sub rosa;* we understand that nothing is of more help to him in his own development than a fine confidence between him and his parents. No one could ever wish to return to the old policy of silence—yet we have so far had little opportunity to study the troubles which come as a result of too much detailed information, prematurely given. An

accurate account of detailed facts, biological and obstetrical, may in some instances result in a confusion and misrepresentation as complete as ever a stork story—only of a different sort. For the intellectual and emotional components of human marriage and procreation are a most significant part of "the story of life," and they are too often neglected by conscientious Aunt Priscillas who are bent upon telling facts in all their crudity, completely overlooking the spirit and the significance which gives them their proper setting. Once our own repressions are overcome,—and the overcoming of these is for the up-to-date parent a moral obligation—it is not difficult to make sex information fairly intelligible to the young child. But it is a real feat to convey the feeling side of the matter, without which the facts may prove very misleading, and avoid waxing sentimental.

Turning to the field of religious training which is our special concern here, we find a situation which is, in a way, analogous. Again, we are well able to judge the ill effects of doctrinal teaching,—either the fear of the Lord colored by the fires of hell, or the sentimental devotion to a beneficent tyrant proved non-existent by mature study and thought. But we have as yet little evidence to prove that it is materially better to withhold all traditional religious belief from children, on the grounds "that we must not bias them,"—"they must think for themselves." One may interpolate here the truism,

often overlooked, that one cannot think unless one have something to "think with."

In our first chapter, there were mentioned three characteristic attitudes toward the religious education of children. According to one of these, religious tradition is essentially superstition, and it is all wrong to willingly expose children to its influence. Since our basic principle is integrity, people who assume this attitude can do no otherwise than withhold such teaching. The opposite position is represented by those who hold with a greater or less degree of strictness to literal interpretation of the Bible and the doctrines of the church. These are able to give traditional religion in all its beauty to their children as the truth. Their problem is merely one of selection—of the adjustment of content to children's needs and comprehension. Still another attitude distinguishes a thoughtful group, who are frankly questioning of ancient dogma, but who have meanwhile worked out for themselves a "substance of things hoped for and an evidence of things unseen." People of this sort are often sadly hampered in dealing with their children because they are so afraid of telling stories or making statements which they themselves think are not "literally true." A curious contradiction seems to distinguish their thinking. Toward moral teaching their attitude is entirely positive. They have passed quite beyond the "Thou shalt nots," to the commandment "Thou shalt love." But in other ways their

feeling in regard to religious teaching has undergone a reverse process: it is distinguished by "I-don't-knows" and "We-can't-be-sures," because, like Aunt Priscilla, they must stick to the truth be it ever so painful.

There appeared in the *Forum* in 1925 an excellent article on this very subject, entitled "What to Tell the Children?" The writer, Mildred Stillman, cites the case of a little girl whose thoughtful and conscientious mother had tried to explain her own belief in a nebulous "Ultimate Good." Meanwhile the child's grandmother, an Episcopalian, took the child to services now and then, and answered her questions simply, in the beautiful symbolic language of tradition. Said the little girl, "I believe in grandmother's God." No wonder, for as the author of the article very sagely states, "It is more natural for any normal child to believe in a loving father than in an 'Over Soul,' in 'Cosmic Forces,' or in any of the coinages of modern philosophy." The criterion of whether we are being truthful in our dealings with children does not lie in literal accuracy on our part, but rather in whether or not they take from the things which we tell them our real meaning, so far as they are capable of understanding it. The more appropriate are the symbols we use, the better will they understand.

Let us return to that loveliest of stories, the Nativity as it is told in Luke's gospel, and ask ourselves how far the enlightened are justified in tell-

ing it "as though it were true." Who shall say where poetry and symbol begin, where literal accuracy ends?

Probably if this story is beautifully told by someone who appreciates it, no child under seven will ever come from under the spell of its charm enough to ask, "Is it true?" But suppose some child does: can we handle the question without ruining the story? In the mood which is characteristic of many of us at the moment, the impulse is to back away from such a challenge and say to the child, "I don't know,"—or, "It is just a lovely story." Yet it hardly seems necessary, if one thought the story worth telling at all, to go to this extreme. For if it is worth telling, some of it *is* true, and the truth is more worthy of emphasis than one's doubts concerning literal accuracy. It is true that concerning the birth of the Child at Bethlehem there was and still is great rejoicing, that during His life and since He lived it His name has been associated with beauty and song. A child who will question the truth of this story is mature enough to understand, in substance, this explanation. Surely it is wiser to stress one's belief in the Christ than one's doubts concerning the literal detail of opening heavens and the angels' song. It is also the case that the less one's doubts interfere with one's own appreciation, the more easily may one carry the truth within it to the youthful mind.

Now in selecting the stories, illustrations, poems,

and songs which we shall use in the religious education, we will, if we are intelligent, consider their value as symbols to the child mind of what we consider to be the truth. Probably the stories of the miracles of Jesus are less effective in this respect than are certain others—they seem out of place for use with the preschool child, who tends to take from them only their wonder-working aspect. Their symbolic value, rather, is for the older child, who can appreciate their underlying truth. Yet if a younger child hears a miracle story, and asks, "Is it true?" it is possible here, as in the narrative of the Nativity, to stress what seems to us to be its truth and allow the child himself to decide how literally he will accept its detail. Christ was, we believe, possessed of power to heal the sick and suffering beyond that of many. It has been said that the medical science of today has still much to do to disprove the healing power of Jesus. He was possessed of a strength and a quietness of soul which made possible to Him deeds which the frivolous and the distracted could never accomplish. We cannot say this in these words to a small child, but we can at least put our effort toward conveying it as well as we can rather than emphasize our own quibbling doubts. Again quoting Stillman's article: "To insist on 'Truth or nothing' for our children seems to me an attitude of conceited intellectualism. Rather let us tell them the 'old, old story.' . . . But let us try to guide the children as unobtrusively

and suggestively as possible, and leave them to choose only what seems true to them."

We must however remember that our best efforts to convey through childish symbols what we think are the basic truths of existence need to be carefully watched and checked upon. Children differ in their ability to distinguish between the literal and the figurative, and confusions arise no matter how consistently we try to avoid them. For example, small Thomas could not at first distinguish between the symbolic heart of which his mother had often spoken in talking with him and his brother about God, and the physical heart the beats of which he could feel.

"When you die," he remarked, "you go into someone's heart, and then you grow up and are born again. If you cut through my heart, mother, could you see God?"

"No," responded his mother, "because you can't see love, and God is love. You must feel it. You can feel mother's love for you, but you can't see it."

"Well," insisted Thomas, "If God really were there you could see Him when you cut into your heart. What *do* you see when you cut into a heart?"

"Blood," replied his mother.

"Can't you see even a teeney bit of God?"

"No, He isn't there any more. When you've cut into a heart it dies and God's love goes into another heart."

More discussions followed about why you couldn't see love but could see the things love does. For some time Thomas' mother could not make clear to him the distinction between the physical heart and the symbolic heart where love resides. But eventually he seemed to grasp the idea which had eluded him at first because of his preoccupation with anatomy. One day he said,

"Is God in your heart when you are a baby?"

"Yes," responded his mother.

"When you are just an egg?"

"Yes."

"Then," with a kind of pleased laugh, "does He grow up as you grow up?"

"Yes," answered his mother, "I think God gets stronger in our hearts all the time. Not bigger. When we do a kind thing, God becomes stronger within us."

How much further Thomas meditated on this subject is a matter for conjecture, but for the time being at least he had grasped the significance of his mother's explanations. God was in his heart, had always been there, would grow as he grew. The thought pleased him.

Religious teaching is so much a matter of creating attitude, of establishing right feeling, that it is difficult to reconcile it with the training in thinking for oneself which is after all a necessary concomitant. One hopes to know what children are thinking—indeed, one must, in order to check con-

fusions such as, for example, the confusion Thomas showed. But it is not easy to question them about their appreciations and experiences without becoming formal and intellectualistic—without killing the feeling one has tried to create.

A nice illustration of what happens when one makes a practice of asking children to express what they feel, to describe or make graphic their appreciations, is supplied by the following incident. The kindergarten classes from a city settlement were taken by their teachers to Fifth Avenue, to enjoy the beauty of the florist shops. The group stopped before an especially lovely window, and the children gazed with "oh's" and "ah's" of delight. One little boy seemed especially enthralled. He stood, his nose pressed against the window pane. The teacher drew near, hoping to hear some expression of his enjoyment. As she approached, an older boy standing by nudged the younger one and said in a loud whisper, "Stop lookin' at them. She'll make you draw them when you get back." In fact the custom of this teacher had been to ask the children to tell a story, or draw some of their impressions after every trip of this sort. The custom was revised after this episode!

Nevertheless progress in religious education is coincident with increased skill in guiding thinking without killing appreciation. It is a technique which cannot be accurately described in so many words. The adult who would learn it must be possessed of

imagination and acute appreciations himself, and must be able to discuss his appreciations in child-like language without the embarrassment which hampers so many of us.

Stories about Jesus, and the encouragement of children's spontaneous reactions to them represent in the writer's experience the best method of approach. A most interesting and thought-provoking instance of the use of this method is given in Bronson Alcott's "Conversations with Children on the Four Gospels," published in Boston in 1836-37. In the two volumes which make up this work are the verbatim records of Alcott's discussions on religion with a group of children in his Temple School.

These "Conversations" are first of all interesting because of the time in which they were carried on. It was a day in which current religious education was of the sort illustrated in some of the quotations in the last chapter. A religion of fear, of repression, of a Calvinistic God and imminent hell fire was in general the content of religious teaching. At such a time this remarkable man set forth to give his little group of children admission of "the Infinite and Sinless One," planning to go on "in the true spirit of induction, finding what is wanted by consulting the laws of the young mind."

In his introduction, Bronson Alcott writes that the book is "a record of an attempt to unfold the idea of spirit from the consciousness of childhood."

He described his method as that of "presenting the character of Jesus . . . as the brightest symbol of spirit" and "encouraging" the children "to express their views about it." With the literal implications of his first statement, "unfolding spirit from the consciousness of childhood," we moderns are bound to take exception. But his method is one the secret of which we must all strive to find. And even while most of us cannot believe that the child has a peculiar insight during his early years which disappears as he grows older, we still know that he has a freshness of attack, a delighted appreciation of the world about him, which we too often stunt by our clumsy efforts to educate him.

A charming account of Temple School, with excerpts from the "Conversations," appears in Honoré Willsie Morrow's study of Bronson Alcott, entitled "The Father of Little Women." The group of children with whom Alcott worked ranged in age from six to twelve. As the name of the record implies, all of the teaching was done through intimate conversations between the teacher and the pupils following the reading of selections from the gospels. The child who, according to the records, does the most interesting talking, is a six-year-old named Josiah. Mr. Alcott himself considered him unusual, and Miss Peabody, one of the recorders, writes of him, ". . . (his) impediment of speech, stammering, makes his enunciation slow, and (his) fine choice

of language and steadiness of mind make him easy to remember." [1]

Now it must be said that as one reads these records one cannot help feeling that those who took them down rounded them off, and gave them a finish which an actual stenographic record would not have accorded them. One also thinks, in the light of scientific child study, that much unconscious indoctrination by the teacher must have gone on. For instance, the following responses from a six-year-old are hardly credible as they stand:

Mr. Alcott: . . . "all birth is as sacred as that of John's or Christ's—Why was Jesus called the Son of God?"

Josiah: "Because he was a part of God's soul. He was God's voice on earth. He was born of God's power."

And again,

Josiah: "To pray, Mr. Alcott, is to be good, really. There must be something outward about prayer, but we must have some words sometimes, sometimes we need not. If we don't feel the prayer, it is worse than never to have said a word of prayer. It is wrong not to pray, but it us much more wrong to speak prayers and not to pray." [2]

Yet both in reading the original records, and

[1] Cf. Morrow, Honoré Willsie. *The Father of Little Women.* Little Brown, Boston, 1927, pp. 187-188.

[2] Cf. Morrow, op. cit., pp. 168, 183.

from Morrow's delightful selection and interpretation, one is convinced that much real and fruitful thinking did go on, and that the leader conducted the "Conversations" in a spirit of sincerity, simplicity, and respect for childhood only possible to a person of deep insight. Even though the form of expression as it is recorded is not what we recognize as child-like, we may be sure that these children loved the character of Jesus, thought about it deeply, and expressed their thoughts fearlessly. In selecting from them Morrow well says "one is fearful lest in not giving the whole that the remarkable beauty and sweetness of the whole may be lost." "Conversations with Children on the Four Gospels" are full of suggestion to anyone who will read them thoughtfully.

A discussion of fact and symbol should include some mention of the risk involved in using symbolic language thoughtlessly in our dealings with children. To persistently localize heaven as "above," to give the impression that God and Christ dwell in some definite geographic region beyond the clouds, cannot but be hampering to the child's growth. MacLean and others have pointed out how carelessly we allow the child to repeat verses and hymns which build up this notion. It is surely well to use such language as little as possible. On the other hand, it is a question whether it does the child any real harm to sing in Luther's Christmas hymn,

"The stars in the heaven looked down where he lay,"

and

"I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,"

provided one is intelligent about limiting this type of expression. To spoil the rhythm of the song by saying, as some people insist,

"The stars in the bright sky—"

seems straining a point.

Success in the use of traditional stories and symbols in the religious education of little children is limited by the insight and the imagination of those who teach. Dr. Coe [1] has wisely called attention to the fact that we cannot hope to effect any real good by simply "passing on" Christian or any other religious tradition. Rather must each pass on his own vision, the old, old story illumined through his own insight, great or limited. We cannot, even if we would, teach what is the faith of another. To few is it given to revivify the teachings of Jesus as did Bronson Alcott in his Temple School. Yet each may contribute his mite of genius, be it ever so tiny.

We all vary somewhat in our interpretation of how and why "the morning stars sang together," in the meaning which we give to the words, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." But in one sense or another, we all accept and appreciate the song

[1] *What Is Christian Education?* Scribners, New York, 1930.

of the morning stars, and believe in the Resurrection and the Life. Else we should not undertake religious education—or indeed much of any education at all. And this living faith, not our petty quibbles, is what we would enkindle within the small child's mind and heart, through symbols which he can understand.

CHAPTER IX

ONE CHILD AND MANY

"Shall I send my child to Sunday School?" This is a question asked many times over by parents of every variety of background and religious preference. A categorical answer to it is impossible, but let us consider the pros and cons with particular reference to the child under six.

Criticism of Sunday Schools is everywhere in the air. Some of it is justified, some of it thoughtless, some of it deliberately unfair. If Sunday Schools never gave anybody anything, they would not be attended as well as they are. In point of fact, many of them give many people some things which are extremely valuable.

In considering whether or not three- and four- and five-year-old children can profit by going to Sunday School, we must think both of what is good for small children in the way of group association and of the difficulties under which the best of Sunday Schools labor.

One of the most serious oppositions to kindergartens and nursery schools raised by people who have a right to offer opinions, is that a group situa-

tion is often over-stimulating for small children. The notion that the child passes automatically at the age of four or five from an entirely "individualistic" to a "social"" stage of development is not supportable in the light of our present knowledge. As a matter of fact, from the time he can walk about and talk at all, the child is beginning to make social adjustments, is beginning to develop sociability. Socialization is a gradual process, and the ease with which it is achieved in early years depends upon the child's maturity, both physical and mental, and upon his emotional stability. There are some children who even by the age of five are not well placed in a large group—they grow tired, over-excited. There are others who survive a reasonably large group with perfect poise at four. In deciding about Sunday School it must not be overlooked that group association may not be good for certain children.

In comparison with day school, Sunday School presents a different problem. The children meet only once a week. Some people might argue from this that it is therefore less of a strain than meeting every single day. In one sense, perhaps this is true. In another sense, it isn't. Because it does meet only once a week the Sunday School approximates a "party" situation, and we all know what parties do to high-strung children!

Then, too, people who have been studying the problem of the preschool child are most of them ready to say that while group association of a sort

is right and necessary for normal social development, groups of little children should be limited in number. An average attendance of ten seems ideal for a four-year-old group in a day school. Enrolling a group which will average twenty, and employing twice as many assistants, isn't the same thing at all. The assistants themselves add to the confusion of numbers which is so hard for a small child to bear. Most Sunday School groups for small children are of necessity a bit overwhelming in point of numbers. In this matter of overwhelming numbers, there are some children who can and others who can't withstand the strain of conditions which are not ideal. Fewer three-year-olds can bear it than four-year-olds, fewer four-year-olds than five-year-olds, fewer five-year-olds than six-year-olds.

On the other hand, wholesome religion has from the start a social aspect. Worship and prayer are shared experiences, and it is good for the child to share them with others of his own age. From this point of view, if all the conditions are good, and the teaching such that the child's parents can co-operate with it whole-heartedly, probably most four-year-old children and some three-year-olds can profit by going to a Sunday School class.

A most important point to be taken into account in deciding whether one's child shall go to Sunday School is the time schedule of the school. If a session can be short, not more than half an hour, this fact

makes any particular group more desirable for small children than if it were a long session. On the theory that variety helps—true enough, so far as it goes—in many Sunday Schools we hold little children for a session of an hour or longer, letting them join the older children in worship for part of the time. It is a question whether children under five can bear so long a session under average conditions without becoming nervously tired.

Ideally, a Sunday School group for children four and five years old or a bit younger, should be very small. Seven or eight is an ideal number for teaching purposes—more than twelve creates for most little ones a confusing and over-stimulating situation. Ideally, too, the length of the session should be flexible, determined entirely by the interest of the children. Once inattention sets in, one can accomplish little or nothing of religious education in the real sense of the word.

Good Sunday Schools, laboring under the almost universal problems of large numbers of children, poor housing conditions, and far too few adequately trained teachers, have worked out various ways of minimizing their shortcomings and difficulties. Young children, who for practical reasons must arrive and leave when the older ones do, are divided into small groups for a large part of the session, and, when their attention wanders, they are turned to hand-work. Their love of making something to take home saves the day. But, as has

been suggested before, it is rather a question how much hand-work really helps religious education, except in so far as it gives pleasure and creates a happy attitude toward going to Sunday School.

It must have occurred to everyone who has considered the matter that the religious training of little children is essentially a very intimate affair, and that quite outside of any other consideration, it is difficult to accomplish any real teaching when one has a large class. One must know how the children feel about it all, and what they are thinking about, to proceed intelligently. Some of the best equipped Sunday Schools have worked out systems of checking with parents to determine whether the lesson of the week carries over into the child's conduct and conversation in the home. Such checks are very helpful, but ideally if one is teaching small children one wants to hear their spontaneous comments oneself,—supplemented by parents' reports.

Also, one would like to avoid any sense of strain or pressure in connection with religious education. Many little children refuse to speak up at all in a larger group, some of them show off delightedly to "a gallery," very few will respond naturally and intimately. It is almost more than one can expect. Real acquaintance with each child alone makes it possible for the teacher to understand him even though he contributes, as he so often does, a mere monosyllable, and a setting where neither the

child nor the teacher is laboring under the audience situation of a large group is essential for really good work. Again, the younger the child, the more essential is this intimacy and this freedom from group pressure.

The more gifted the teacher, the more easily can she minimize the obstacles inherent in a large group situation. But there are not so very many gifted teachers, and not all of these teach Sunday School. And no matter how skilled or gifted the teacher, such intimate discussions as those between John and Thomas and their mother, or between Margaret and her mother, are out of the question in a large group, and almost out of the question in a small group.

To the question at the beginning of the chapter one might venture an answer somewhat like this: Since religion is essentially a social as well as an individual affair, some experience of group prayer, worship, and discussion seems desirable for the average child of four or older. But the meeting should be short, limited by the child's interest, and very informal in its character. And certainly the group should be very small. On the other hand, the most delicate and important part of religious education, the child's adjustment to the world as he finds it, and to God as he may know Him, goes on best within the intimate relationship of mother or father and child. Ideas which can be discussed fearlessly and reverently with one child whose every

thought the parent knows, cannot be so discussed with many.

"Is God in my heart, and does He grow as I grow?" would hardly be asked in the smallest and most sympathetically guided of groups.

CHAPTER X

BY THEIR FRUITS

In the last analysis, the value of any form of education must be judged by its results in terms of human character and human happiness. Not all the fruits of religious education in bygone days have been good fruits, if we judge them according to the best insight of our own time. That bigotry, intolerance, self-deception, have all too often been the result of so-called religious training, cannot be gainsaid. Leaving out of consideration the actual psychoses traceable to distorted ideas of God or morbid fears of eternal damnation, ill-considered religious instruction has been responsible for much unhappiness, both during childhood years and in adult life.

Yet this very teaching, in Christian lands, included the doctrine of salvation through the sacrifice of One Who said, "Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid." Evidently it is religious education as men have practiced it after losing sight of the vision of Christ, rather than such education *per se,* which is at variance with the best of our modern thought.

Again, in other times religious education has been carried on with little regard for the young child's powers of comprehension or for his real needs. There is many a Bible story, many a doctrine of the Church, which may be beautiful and meaningful for an adult, and at the same time confusing or even terrifying for a little child. At the present time, our effort is to bring our religious teaching as closely as possible into relation with the mind of the Master, with the real thinking of those who have led lives like unto His. At the same time we are making every effort to consider the child's capabilities and his actual life needs in choosing the content and defining the method of religious education.

Let us consider the fruits which we hope for as a result of our religious teaching of little children. For the whole trend of the times, and it is a wholesome one, is to demand results—to ask, as was suggested at the beginning of this chapter, to see desirable changes in human character as the outcome of educational effort.

In our present violent reaction against personal religion's historic sin of selfishness, our tendency is to define our aim in social rather than individual terms. The outcome of religious education which many of us are at present most anxious to stress is the active, Christian character, showing itself in doing good to others for Christ's sake.

Toward this end, we try to train children from

the beginning to think of giving and doing for others as a necessary accompaniment of the Christian life, and we plan to afford them practice in giving by letting them put coins in the offering basket, or by encouraging them to give of their surplus toys to children less fortunate than they. Yet contrary to what seems to be majority opinion, it is difficult to arrange for the child under six a real "giving" situation. And it is not always so easy as one thinks to tell where the spirit of generosity ends and the spirit of self-righteousness begins. Offerings of money are almost always provided by father or mother. Under five, the child's understanding of money value is almost negligible, and the most one can hope to accomplish by the Sunday School offering in the beginners' class is to establish the more or less automatic habit of bringing money to put on the plate on Sunday.

In the informal group to which we have referred several times, the leader felt the artificiality of the offering acutely. She therefore tried consistently to stress with the children that they were giving something which they had themselves been given. They all learned the offertory prayer, "All things come from Thee, O God, and of Thine own have we given Thee," and one or two discussions centered about this prayer and its meaning. The children gave every evidence of understanding it—to the degree that they did so, the leader thought, the offering was a valuable experience.

If the offering of money is to mean something in teaching children a right spirit of giving, they must surely understand the purpose for which their offering is to be used. In the little group just mentioned, two foreign missionaries came and talked with the children at their last meeting about missionary work in a far-away country. The offering for the whole year was presented to these missionaries, and the children seemed really thrilled about sending their offering to help other children in a land far away. With so small a group, a very close personal contact was possible, and every child had a fair inkling of where and why the money was being sent. A method such as this is followed in many Sunday Schools, but in a larger group, be the explanation ever so careful, it is generally only half understood by the younger children.

When it comes to the value as an experience in generous giving of such a project as giving away one's toys, the motive is naturally the thing that counts. In the words of the nursery rhyme,

> "The greediest goop would give away
> The things he didn't need.
> To share the toys with which you play,
> *That's* generous indeed."

But here, as elsewhere, child motive is all too easily misunderstood by adults. The head of a certain Sunday School primary department was convinced that the children's Christmas gifts to others of toys

which they themselves had "outgrown" was a very important part of the department's yearly activities. She had been somewhat discouraged in previous years by the fact that the children brought toys from home which were really fit only to be thrown away. So one Christmas she planned very carefully beforehand: a great deal was said about things which were nice to give away, and things which weren't worth giving. "The gift without the giver is bare—" was in the background of her own mind, and she tried hard to develop this feeling in the children. All sorts of provisions were made for mending and fixing toys in the Sunday School, much approval was expressed when really nice things were brought, and the Sunday before Christmas both the director and her assistants were justly proud of their display. For once the children had *really* given.

The whole department, ranging in age from three-year-old beginners to nine-year-olds who would graduate into the Junior department that year, assembled to admire the results of everyone's labor and generosity. During the opening discussion, five-year-old Mary raised her index finger, pointed straight at her nine-year-old brother, and addressed the leader thus:

"Miss Smith, I'm Abel and Billy's Cain." Miss Smith was nonplussed. Those children had never been told the story of Cain and Abel in *her* department! Wherever she heard the story, Mary

went on to make a direct and pointed application.

"Billy just brought an old book to give to the poor children. *I* brought a beautiful doll!"

Miss Smith's efforts had surely been well-directed. She had done everything she could think of to make that Christmas a season of truly unselfish giving. But she obviously failed in young Mary's case—probably in plenty of others.

One cannot hope for much in the way of "real giving" as direct result of religious teaching, with little children. They have had too little experience in giving—there is too little of their own which they really can give. One must be content with a very small beginning, and be joyfully surprised when one gets a really tangible instance of generosity. And it is quite necessary to guard against self-righteousness, which attends this overt activity as readily and as subtly as it accompanies children's prayers.

When one asks specifically what fruits one may hope for as a result of religious education in the nursery years, the answer is, very few that can be immediately reaped and labeled as such. The rather vague description, "the well-adjusted personality at the nursery level" must probably suffice. This is indeed true of all teaching of younger children; probably early teaching is the most important of all, but those who teach the child in later years—not the primary teachers,—will enjoy seeing

the results of the earliest work. It is especially true with religious education, no less in connection with the "practical Christian virtues" than in connection with the child's first intimate relationship with God. In either aspect of the religious life, in active striving or in quiet understanding, only the tiniest of beginnings is made in the early years. Active striving seems to give us slightly more to report in the way of tangible results—"Billy made this for the children at the hospital," or, "He gave this away of his own accord"—but actually such results are easily over-valued. Outside of occasional spontaneous comments, we who work with little children must be content with very little that really "shows" either in overt doing or quiet thinking. A happy, fearless child—perhaps a child who prays gladly and spontaneously and who is a little more thoughtful of others than most—is the only objective standard we can set.

Concerning the religious life, Rufus Jones has written that it is ". . . of all things a strenuous business. It calls for heroic adventure. But one of the essential aspects of religion, now and always, is the experiment, made in the soul's own laboratory, of the personal discovery of that more than ourselves whom we call God." It is this experiment, animated by the child's own eager curiosity and *joie de vivre* which the present writer believes can best be cultivated during the preschool years—this, rather than "strenuous business" for which the

young child has neither the means nor the power at his command. The visible fruits of this discovery mature slowly: described in modern terms, they are the traits of the well-adjusted personality, and through them alone may the progress of the inner experiment be known of men.

The encouragement of this intimate adventure is the final object of any effort to bring religion into child life.

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